

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 25 : Number Four : Winter 2004

25th Anniversary

Soggy Chips

Elements of Spiritual Leadership

Building a Multi-cultural Community

Exile and Exodus: Paradigms of Life

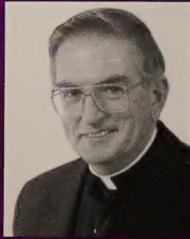
Don't Resist Resistance

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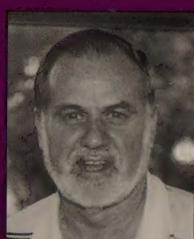
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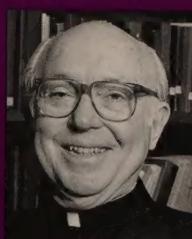
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**James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.**, a priest and psychiatrist, died peacefully on July 29, 2003, after a courageous battle with prostate and bone cancer.

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Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting the Bible, the New Revised Version of the Bible is preferred.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

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# Editor's Page

## OD'S HOPES AND DESIRES

This issue reaches you in the Advent or Christmas season, seasons of great hope and desire. In Advent we cry out in the liturgy, "O come, O come, Emmanuel." At Christmas we hear the angels sing of "peace on earth," and we know that our hearts lift with hope and desire. But our hopes and desires only reflect God's hopes and desires. Just as, in 1962, Martin Luther King electrified the crowd at the Lincoln Memorial with his "I have a dream" speech, so, too, the prophecies of Advent, especially the prophecies of Isaiah, can be heard in God's "I have a dream" speech. No doubt they are meant to stir up our own deepest hopes and desires, but they do so because they express God's hopes and desires.

In figurative, evocative language the prophet Isaiah sought God's dream when he wrote:

*The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.  
The cow and the bear shall graze,  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the  
adder's den.  
They will not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11: 6-9).*

God wants all creation to live in harmony and peace; God wants friendship to prevail between all God's creatures and God. This is the message of Advent and Christmas, God's dream.

Clearly, our world and even our church are far from corresponding to God's dream. Wars and the anxiety of terrorist attacks, the effects of economic dislocations and poverty, distrust of those who are not like "us" bedevil our

world. Swords have not been beaten into ploughshares. In the aftermath of the sexual abuse crisis bishops and cardinals have had to resign their posts; priests have left their parishes in disgrace, some protesting their innocence and having no way, it seems, to prove it or to regain their reputations; many, many survivors of past sexual abuse and their families continue to suffer the consequences; trust, mutual sympathy and friendship seem in short supply in the church. In addition we have seen an escalation of angry rhetoric and vituperation between "progressive" and "conservative" Catholics. The recent presidential campaign saw this escalation reach new heights. The calf, the lion and the fatling are no closer to lying down together, it seems, than in Isaiah's time.

Is the dream of Advent and Christmas, then, a pipe dream? Some might reply that God's dream refers to the time after the end of this world. I cannot agree. Jews and early Christians believed that God's dream had relevance for this world. Jesus preached the imminent coming of God's kingdom, a kingdom that, in fact, had already become present in him and in his ministry. If he had only preached a kingdom beyond this world, he would never have been crucified. No, if God's dream has no relevance for this world and our time, it is a pipe dream. Because, however, we are talking about God's dream, God's motive for creating our world, it cannot be a pipe dream. God is actively working in this world to bring about the dream. It must, therefore, be possible to live in accordance with God's dream, and there must be instances of its presence in our world.

Recently, I read the second revised edition of the late Donald Nicholl's *Holiness* (Pauline Editions, Boston, 2004), a remarkably compelling and generous look at God's dream in creation. Nicholl takes his cue from the first chapter of the book of Genesis where we read: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Gen 1: 27). If we are made in God's image, then, he argues, we are made to be holy, to act like God in this world. The

upshot is that we are called to befriend the world and all in it because to do so is to be like God. In other words, from the very beginning of creation human beings have been called to live out God's dream in this world. Nicholl's book gives very practical pointers as to how to carry out our part in God's dream and numerous examples of ordinary people living in accord with God's dream. It is not a pipe dream to believe that we can live in accord with God's dream. It has been done; hence it is possible for us to do our part.

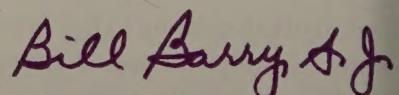
However, one consistent impediment to living with real hope in God's dream is the sense of the enormity of the task. "The world and the church are in a terrible mess; how can I do anything that might reverse the mess?" I write these words at the Jesuit retreat house in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Often enough in places such as this one hears retreatants and even retreat directors speak of the impending return to the "real world," which, unfortunately, can give the impression that the retreat house is not in the "real world" or has little to do with it. But a retreat is a waste of time if it has no relevance to the "real world" in which we live. So, too, God's dream is a pipe dream if we cannot live at least in some sort of harmony with it, that is, if we cannot act in *our part of the world* in accord with God's dream. The italicized words are important for our sense of hopefulness. We are not responsible for the whole world, only for doing our best where we are to live in accord with God's dream.

How do we begin to do this? We need to take seriously our own desire for the "peaceable kingdom" as a reflection of God's desire. Then we reflect on the fact that every other human being has this same desire and that every other human being is as fearful and concerned about how to achieve it as we are. We are all in the same boat in this world. All of us exist because of God's desire for us, and all of us are created in the image of God. All of us are, therefore, sons and daughters of God, members of the family of God. No matter what our social class, nationality, race or background we are all brothers and sisters together. No matter what we have done in our lives, no matter our sins, our crimes, our failures, we are all brothers and sisters, and all of us want what God wants. Moreover, all of us are afraid that the peaceable kingdom God wants may be unattainable, and that we may be foolish even to hope for it, let alone act in this world as though it is attainable. I believe that the first thing we can do to begin to live in accord with God's dream is to recognize our neighbors as brothers and

sisters who are no different than we, with the same hopes and fears that we have. Everyone we meet is more like us than different. We can begin to act in our part of the world from this conviction. By doing so we become part of the ongoing work of God.

I want to end with an example of trying to live out God's dream in an unlikely place. For a few years I have been corresponding with and visiting Darrell Jones, an African-American prisoner serving a life sentence for murder, a murder he swears he did not commit. In prison he has had a religious conversion. As a result he tries to do what he can, given the constraints of his world, to live in accord with God's dream. He recognizes that the prisons are peopled with men like him whose children are likely to follow them and, in some cases, have followed them into the prison system. During a particularly bad period of gang violence in his former neighborhood he decided that he should do something. "I owe that community out there, and my own sons who are in that community, enough respect to try and do something 'in-house' to try and put a dent in the cycle." What he could do, he did. Against all odds and at some cost to his own credibility in the prison, he persuaded a large number of fellow prisoners, some from rival gangs back in the neighborhood, to agree to sign a letter of apology for whatever they had done to make their communities so violent and to beg their sons, nephews and friends to give up violence. "It's time that those who once stood for crime be seen denouncing it, that some of these men in here try to save the lives of their own sons and family if nothing else." After obtaining their signatures, he wrote to various newspapers, unfortunately without success, asking them to run this apology. (The sentences quoted above are from that letter.) In spite of the failure of this venture, he still tries to do what he can from behind bars to make a difference in the lives of his fellow prisoners, his sons and of his neighborhood. My friend is doing what he can where he is to live in accord with God's dream. If he can do it, why can't any of us?

"I have a dream," says God. Will we be part of the fulfillment of this dream, or part of the problem?



William A. Barry, S.J., Ph.D.  
Editor-in-Chief

# Soggy Chips

Michael F. Weiler, S.J., Psy.D.



'Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish will give a snake?'

— Luke 11: 11

“Soggy chips,” ‘soggy chips,’ now how do I say ‘soggy chips’ in Spanish?” I was teaching an evening parenting course for Sacred Heart Nativity School, a junior high school for “at risk” boys in a poor neighborhood of San Jose, California. The students were all people of color, mostly Latino, with the advantages of a tie to a local Catholic parish and a family interested in their education.

The students and their families commit to paying a minimal part of the cost and to support an eleven-month, ten-and-one-half-hour-day program, along with weekend events twice each month. Though the students all speak English, most of their parents speak only Spanish. “Soggy chips” is a key concept in psychologist Jody Kussin’s manual on parenting, *Catch Them Being Good*, so I was groping for an adequate Spanish translation. Several times before, but to English-speaking groups, I had taught her system, which she developed over several years of working with families and supervising therapist interns at the Glen Roberts Child Study Center in Glendale, California. The system revolves around a simple, critical truth: children need attention, most especially attention from their parents.

## The system revolves around a simple, critical truth: Children need attention, most especially attention from their parents.

Needing attention has bad connotations in contemporary society. It suggests weakness and dependency. People whose need for attention is obvious are often considered spoiled or immature. Some even consider overt requests for attention as bad behavior in itself, behavior that requires correction. *Catch Them Being Good* takes exactly the opposite approach to demands for attention. This program understands the human need for attention as both authentic and healthy, similar to the human need for food. In the same way parents must satisfy their children's need for food, they must fulfill their children's need for attention.

### ATTENTION

Attention may be either positive — affirming, complimenting, praising — or it may be negative — scolding, punishing, criticizing. Both types of attention are indeed attention and fulfill a child's need for attention, just as true hunger is satisfied by whatever food may be at hand, regardless of how good or bad the food may taste. However, given an option, a child will choose good-tasting food over unappetizing food. In the snack room of child and adolescent taste preferences, they will always prefer fresh, crisp chips rather than old soggy chips. The choice is obvious: fresh chips over soggy chips. The analogous preference in terms of attention also holds true; given an abundance of "fresh chips," no child prefers "soggy chips"; given an abundance of positive attention, no child prefers negative attention. Praise or scolding; fresh chips or soggy — the choice is both obvious and natural.

The challenge to parents, therefore, is to provide sufficient positive attention, or "fresh chips," so that their children have neither need nor appetite for "soggy chips" or negative attention. Communicating positive attention — giving "fresh chips" — occurs in two very different moments. It is critical to distinguish these two moments. In the first, the most fundamental,

the child needs to be affirmed in her or his very being. The positive attention addresses the essential goodness of the person: "You are good because that is who you are." The second moment resembles the first but differs from it radically. In the second moment, it is not the being or personhood of the child that is affirmed, but her or his behavior. Now it is not the person but the action that is praised, affirmed and rewarded by attention: "I like the way you play quietly with your brother." Because the positive attention in this second moment addresses the behavior rather than the persons themselves, it is sometimes not appropriate. This second moment for giving positive attention requires that we "*catch them being good*," as the title of the parenting manual states.

### BEHAVIOR

Behavior can be good, bad or neutral; bad behavior is not rewarded with positive attention. Quite the contrary, when possible, it is better to withdraw all attention, to ignore the behavior of which you don't approve. In the first moment, however, the attention that affirms the goodness of the person, independent of her or his behavior, must not be withdrawn for whatever reason. We *love* people for who they are; we *praise* them because of what they do. Confusing the two moments leads to monstrous consequences. Communicating to children that you love them only when they conduct themselves in a certain manner undermines their fundamental human dignity.

Children need attention; they die without it. Studies in the development of infants have demonstrated convincingly that children deprived of human attention fail to thrive. In their book *First Feelings*, psychiatrist Stanley Greenspan and his wife, Nancy Thorndike Greenspan, describe convincingly how very early in life, as early as the first months after birth, the emotional and cognitive life of the infant requires the presence and attention of a loving parent to develop normally. This need for parental attention continues throughout childhood. Hopefully, the majority of the attention provided is positive, i.e., "fresh chips." However, in the absence of sufficient positive attention, the child seeks whatever attention is available, even at the cost of incurring anger and criticism from the closest caregivers. Children who grow up consistently having their need for attention fulfilled with negative attention, i.e., "soggy chips," may eventually grow so

accustomed to negative attention that they seem to prefer, and therefore demand, scolding, criticism and punishment rather than positive attention from others. Though it may seem preposterous that a child prefers soggy chips" to "fresh chips," a steady diet of "soggy chips" may so distort the child's sense of taste that she or he may actually choose the "soggy chips" over the fresh ones. Such children need to have their preference oriented toward positive attention, the "fresh chips" that they would normally want.

#### SPECIAL TIME"

Most parents naturally affirm the goodness of their children and teach appropriate behavior by giving attention, both positive and negative, as well as by withdrawing attention. More often, the challenge to good parents, as it is for all those who care for children, is to communicate their love clearly and effectively, without resorting to negative attention and within the practical constraints of their limited time and energy.

Much of the body of Kussin's book addresses simple ways to schedule regular periods dedicated to giving positive attention to each child. To provide that fundamental attention that affirms the basic goodness of the child, Kussin recommends "Special Time." "Special Time" consists of one pre-arranged hour of one-on-one time spent with the child in an activity of the child's choosing. Having the undivided attention of the parent confirms to the child her or his value in a way that sharing such time with even one other sibling could never accomplish. So long as the activity brings parent and child into face-to-face interaction, almost any activity will do. Finally, prearranging the appointment for this "Special Time" and posting it in a prominent place in the home multiplies the effect because each time the child sees the appointment, she or he experiences in anticipation the attention of the parent: "Look how important I am that my mother wants to waste an entire hour with me." Once the parents in the course began to implement "Special Time" with their younger children, their older, and even adult, children often clamored for equal time.

The impact on the lives of children and their families following just a few months of practicing weekly "Special Time" was remarkable. One couple in the parenting course described how every school day they battled with their eight-year-old daughter to get her up and ready for school in the morning. Typically it involved

Praise or scolding; fresh chips or soggy — the choice is both obvious and natural.

twenty to thirty minutes of haranguing her; it made the parents late for work and started the day off on a sour note. Less than eight weeks after beginning regular "Special Time" sessions with their daughter, the parents reported the usual morning conflict magically gone.

Another mother of a sixteen-year-old lamented how she could barely be in the same room with her daughter, how her daughter would complain, criticize her and stomp off angrily. The daughter persistently failed to comply with house rules and seemed to provoke her mother into nagging and threats of further restrictions. In the parenting course this mother insisted that "Special Time" would be impossible for her to do; her daughter would never agree. Finally, after much convincing of the mother and even more negotiation with the daughter, they agreed to go to the movies together. Usually movies, like television, violate the "face-to-face" requirement of "Special Time," but dealing with adolescents, especially angry adolescents, sometimes requires compromise. The compromise consisted of this arrangement: The two of them would drive to the movie theater district together, park at least three blocks away from the entrance and enter the theater separately. The daughter insisted that her friends not be able to see her with her mother. After entering the theater separately, they would sit beside each other in the dark. When the movie ended they would repeat the procedure and meet back at the car. The contact was so minimal, it didn't seem possible to expect anything positive from it, yet it was agreed that it was the best they could manage, given the state of their relationship.

#### IMPACT OF SIMPLE ATTENTION

The following week in class, the mother walked into the classroom with a broad smile and an amazing story. After complying with all her daughter's requirements and driving mostly in silence to the theater, a remarkable change occurred on the way home. Her

daughter, for the first time, began to ask questions about her mother's childhood, her experiences in adolescence and even asked advice about relationships with boys. It was easily the best interaction they had had in several years. The impact of simple attention, given consistently and lovingly, can have a tremendous, positive influence on the relationships of parents with their children.

The Nativity School parents who attended my course often worked two jobs and cared for three or more children. Their days typically began around 5:00 a.m. in order to prepare themselves and their children for the day ahead and see their children to school before going to work. They gathered their children from the Nativity School around 6:00 p.m. before returning home and preparing the evening meal. Clean-up, homework and preparation for putting the children to bed filled the rest of their evening, leaving precious little time for spouses to be together or single parents to have a quiet moment. By the conclusion of the course, parents often asked, "What about Special Time for me?"

They were absolutely right. That fundamental need for attention from those we love does not end with adulthood. We don't outgrow the need to be affirmed. So I encouraged parents to arrange "Special Time" for themselves with their spouses: agree ahead of time when and where to meet, what to do. Post the appointment on the refrigerator, along with those for the children. Keep the appointment, regardless of what other urgent matters might threaten to interfere. No significant relationship can thrive without such regular, individual time set aside just for each other, and no human being thrives without such relationships.

Though most of the families at Sacred Heart Nativity School enjoy the advantage of two parents, some in my course were single parents. To them I urged that they find the same regular "Special Time" to do something with a close friend or relative, to write a significant letter to someone they loved, or to spend some peaceful time truly alone with themselves. It is especially important that single parents have support from outside their immediate family to avoid the tempting, but always disastrous, alternative of seeking that attention from their children. Of course, all single people, including priests and religious, have the need to receive this affirming attention; they require it as human beings. As is the situation with single parents, they face the challenge of finding that attention beyond the people they care for or serve.

## PRAYER

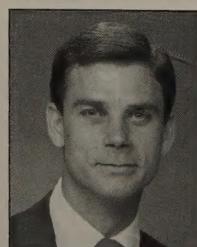
For anyone of faith, one source of such attention is prayer. Though typically prayer is experienced as my turning my attention to God, the truth is that it is God who first attends and whose attention really matters. Prayer is God's giving "Special Time" for me. Saint Ignatius in his *Spiritual Exercises* takes this same perspective when he writes, "I will put myself standing for the space of an Our Father, my intellect raised on high, considering how God our Lord is looking at me (emphasis added)... and will make an act of reverence or humility" (Third Annotation). Whether from a loving parent, a spouse, a devoted friend or the living God, our heart and soul's hunger is satisfied truly and healthily only when we receive the special attention of those who love us.

I never found a satisfying translation for "Soggy Chips." My first attempt, *papas fritas mojadas* (wet fried potatoes), met a classroom full of blank stares. But the parents themselves provided what I lacked, and we landed on *Doritos frescos* (fresh Doritos) and *Doritos viejos* (old Doritos) for fresh and soggy chips. I made up for the weakness of translation with a concrete experience that gave the parents an actual taste of the concept. On the first night of class, I insisted the parents sample from a bowl chips I'd aged in the freezer for one week. "Ugh, I would never serve these to my kids!" they laughed in response. "Then let's not," I concluded.

## RECOMMENDED READINGS

Kussin, J. R. *Catch Them Being Good: A Guide to Positive Parenting*. Glendale, CA: Verdugo Mental Health Center, 1996.

Greenspan, S. I. and N. T. Greenspan. *First Feelings: Milestones in the Emotional Development of Your Baby and Child*. New York: Penguin Books Reprint, 1994.

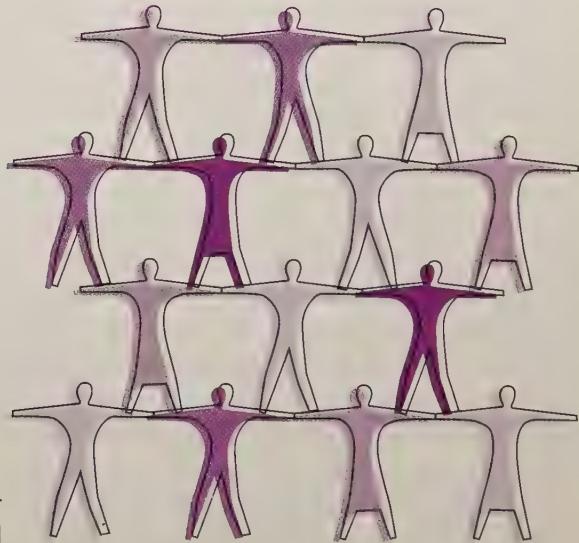


Father Michael Weiler, S.J., Psy.D., a clinical psychologist, worked in university and parish ministry before becoming Director of Novices for the California Province of the Society of Jesus.

# Building a Multi-cultural Community:

## FINDING COMMON GROUND IN A DIVERSE WORLD

Terry R. Armstrong, Ph.D.



Two contradictory forces struggle for dominance in the modern world — globalization or (homogenization) and cultural diversity. Survival, it appears, depends on building a bridge between the two. Unless we grasp an understanding of the “power of culture” and the “power of economic globalization” to discover a way to create a bridge uniting the two, we will be doomed to perpetual cultural wars. This is not only true in the world at large, but also within our own organizations, and even in the church itself.

### EASANT WISDOM

As a community development organizer in the coffee-growing mountains of Colombia, I learned an important lesson. I had been working with a number of villages helping them build schools and health center when some community leaders invited me to their village to help them build a bridge. The bridge would have shortened their journey to the market by three hours during the dry season and by many more hours during the rainy season. It seemed like a good project and, a bit naïve, I eagerly accepted their invitation to see how I might help. Unluckily for me I took off in a tropical downpour, and seven hours later I arrived at the small bamboo village, never so happy to have a bowl of hot sugar water and some rice. When the rain stopped they took me to the gorge where they

## My mis-framing of the problem could have led to disastrous results. I found that how we frame a problem can be helpful or disastrous.

planned on building a swinging bridge. The gorge was barely thirty feet wide, and my Yankee ingenuity immediately went to work on devising a means for building the bridge.

"It should be no problem," I assured them, and I told them I would speak with the departmental engineer to obtain some help.

An old barefooted man spoke up. "Señor," he said, "before you go about planning how to build the bridge, why don't you ask why it hasn't yet been built?"

I was speechless. Indeed, if the bridge would save the peasants so much time, why hadn't it already been built? My naïveté was about to get an entire village and me into trouble. I later found out that the reason there wasn't a bridge across the gorge was because on one side of it was a liberal village and on the other a conservative village. As an outsider I hadn't realized that the pangs of *La Violencia* still burned deep. If the bridge had been built there would have been bloody warfare. The bridge had not been built, not because of technological reasons, but because of social ones.

The peasant understood that the problem of having a bridge was not a simple technological one but rather a complex social and cultural problem. I saw the problem as a technological problem. I had framed the situation in terms of technology rather than in cross-cultural terms. My mis-framing of the problem could have led to disastrous results. I found that how we frame a problem can be helpful or disastrous.

### GLOBALIZATION VERSUS CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The real culprit in my misdiagnosis in Colombia was my own ethnocentrism and lack of cross-cultural understanding. We have the tendency to believe that others see the world the way we do. When we find out

they don't, we are shocked. I first became acutely aware of this phenomenon when President Kennedy stated that Khrushchev "really believed in Communism." I was just a teen-ager at the time, but I was shocked that what was obvious to me surprised President Kennedy. In fact, cultural violence due to cross-cultural misunderstanding has been around a long time, as any brief history of the world will quickly demonstrate. What is profoundly different is that we truly live in a "global village," even though that is now a terribly worn-out term. Everyone knows about the power of the mass media and that it is with us to stay. Most have some idea of what globalization is, even if we don't understand it. Further, we must not only understand cultural differences, but we also must learn how to live in a culturally pluralistic world and learn not only how to understand those who are different from us, but how to come to appreciate cultural differences without losing our own cultural consciousness.

In a study of cross-cultural differences between Western (U.S. and U.K.) and Indian companies, important differences were found that impact the ways Indians work with Westerners. Using psychologist Geert Hofstede's widely accepted model of cultural differences, the study found that cultural differences are deep and complex and that it is easy to be fooled by superficial symbols of culture, such as world-wide adoption of such things as Compaq, Dell, New York Yankees baseball caps and Coke. This study was undertaken because of the increasing business partnerships between India and the West. The Indians had a very high "Power Distance score" as opposed to the low "Power Distance score" for their Western associates. This means that Indians are likely to have a greater tolerance for hierarchical environments and are more likely to belong to cohesive "in-groups," whereas the Westerners tend to resist groups, are individualistic and believe power should be shared. There was also a major difference in the way they deal with time, with Westerners operating with a short-term orientation compared with the long-term time horizon of Indians. Having such different orientations to both "power" and "time" can easily lead to conflicts between groups, even though they may have the same goals.

Common goals are important, but they are not enough. Too often we think that if we have the same goals we can achieve them together, but we may have very different means. And, then again, we may agree on means but not on goals. We must agree on means

and goals, and this is not as easy as it may seem. Too often I've seen conflict within an organization that had the same goals and the same means, but the participants did not give them the same rank order. In fact, some of the bitterest conflicts I have been asked to mediate have been when goals and means were agreed upon but the parties had a different rank ordering. For example, one group's "1" was the other group's "10." They had not spent time discussing the differences, and thus each group felt that the other group was deliberately manipulating or sabotaging them, when in fact the problem was not one of goals or means but of values.

### I THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

One of my most humiliating moments was when I discovered I was color-blind. As a teen-ager I had many arguments with my mother about the color of my clothes, the house, the car and what she wore. I even had run-ins with the police about red lights. Of course, I knew they were wrong and would become furious that others would pick on me about something of which I was absolutely certain. After returning from the Peace Corps I received a letter from the draft board asking me to show up for my Army physical. I wasn't too excited about going but was absolutely shocked when the doctor told me I was color-blind. I realized that I had been wrong all those years when arguing with my mother and others in authority about color.

My perceptions were simply wrong. I saw the world differently than others did. Had I learned about my being color-blind earlier, the discovery may not have had such an impact on me, but I had been absolutely certain that I knew what was right and that they didn't. Knowing that others see the world differently than I do has not only been humbling but also educational. It has helped me realize that there are many things besides color that others see differently than I. Others see a very different world than I do, and they may well be right, and I may well be wrong. This has not made me feel inferior or less of a person, but it has taught me that I must listen and try to understand what the other party sees. It has also made me realize that I may be correct and they may be wrong; but that doesn't keep them from believing that they are correct and I am wrong. As I have dealt with people from many cultures over the years, this humility based on self-awareness of my color disorientation has proven invaluable.

We believe what we perceive. For us our perceptions are true. Others believe in the same manner. They, too, believe that what they see is true.

Another perception problem I have had since childhood also drove home the point that others perceive the world differently than I do. While a teen-ager I decided to learn the Morse code using flash cards. When I went to take my ham radio test I discovered that I had learned the Morse code backwards. Neither my instructor nor I could figure out how I had learned the entire code backwards. Determined to get my ham radio license, I relearned the code using sound and wiped away my visual memory of the code. It took me a long time to relearn the code, but I've now been a radio operator for more than four decades and have come to enjoy conversations in Morse. The learning problem I discovered when I tested for the Morse code is called dyslexia. For me, dyslexia, combined with my color-blindness, led to humility and wisdom. I often wish those who are so certain about their world view could live in my world for just a few days.

We believe what we perceive. For us our perceptions are true. Others believe in the same manner. They, too, believe that what they see is true. The truth is in the eye of the beholder, but the lie is there, also. Wisdom begins with the realization that perception of the world and even of ourselves is fundamentally flawed. I pray daily that I see myself, and the world, through God's eyes rather than mine.

### A MIDDLE EASTERN MEDIATION

Asked to mediate between a North American entrepreneur and an Arabic business venture, I learned a few more lessons about finding common ground in a diverse world. The American entrepreneur needed venture capital to expand his business, and the Arabic venture was looking for new technologies it could buy and use in the oil industry in the Middle East. I met with both parties separately in the United States, toured the facility and reviewed financial records. All our discussions and interactions followed traditional

**Certainly being the first one to trust is risky. It is important to know that trust is an act of risk-taking and, in some instances, can even get you killed.**

business protocols, and I was given all the information I requested. A couple months later we met in the Middle East. Upon arrival I was met at the airport and chauffeured everywhere. We met in a secluded urban location, and tough negotiations went on for several days except for regularly schedule prayer periods.

The negotiations ended on a positive note financially, and both parties were happy with the results. I was exhausted from the ordeal. This was one of the toughest mediations I had experienced in my life. In relative terms this was not a complex transaction. It was a simple, two-party negotiation in which both parties knew what they wanted, and it was in both parties' interest to "make a deal." Why, then, was it so difficult?

Upon much reflection, and numerous mediations later, I realized that both parties needed and wanted the deal. However, there was very low trust between the two parties — and this was before September 11, 2001. After visiting the Middle East after 9/11, it is clear that trust there for the West is nearly non-existent.

#### TRUST IS ESSENTIAL

Trust is not only essential to mediation, but also to all human relationships. Without some degree of trust, positive human relationships are virtually impossible. Trust, and you will be trusted. Certainly being the first one to trust is risky. It is important to know that trust is an act of risk-taking and, in some instances, can even get you killed. Trust is something that has to be built and maintained, and it can be destroyed quickly. Also, once it is destroyed it takes an enormous effort and a lot of time to rebuild.

Community building has a lot to do with building trust and creating an atmosphere in which everyone in the community feels safe. Even in a purely business negotiation that is primarily about exchanging goods,

services, knowledge and money, trust is essential to carry out the transaction. And when one is trying to build a community in which traditions, sense of identity and survival are central, trust building is paramount. In fact, I do not believe that anything is more important than trust. This is especially true when trying to create a multi-cultural community because of unknown and potentially threatening possibilities.

#### TAKING TIME TO LISTEN

Without listening, understanding is impossible. Taking time to listen also communicates interest and respect. Beyond this, it helps build trust. Often I have listened to clients wander for hours; then, as we are about to wind down our conversation and I get up to leave, I am told to wait a minute. They have something they must tell me. I've learned that that is the golden moment. No matter what else I have to do I sit back down and listen. I do this because I've learned that this is the moment for which they have been waiting.

This lesson I first learned as a parent. When my children had important things to tell me it was always late at night after we had talked for hours. Just as I was falling asleep or begging out to go to bed, they would say, "Wait dad, I need to tell you something." It was after all the talking and all the listening that they were able to open up and share their deepest fears. When they first came home from school, they loved to talk about their day and their achievements. But only after hours of my listening did they bare their souls.

Corporate executives, church leaders and seasoned diplomats are no different. They will wait until they know you are really listening before they will tell you what you really need to hear. If you never listen, you will never hear what you must; thus, you proceed in ignorance, with often-disastrous results.

As a young management consultant I made a lot of money listening while I smoked my pipe and nodded my head. It was difficult to believe that people would pay me to listen to them tell me their problems. I don't smoke a pipe anymore, but I still listen as people tell me their stories.

Everyone needs to be heard — the powerless and the powerful — the young and the old. This became poignantly obvious while I was in training to be a hospital chaplain. One day while I was doing my rounds an elderly lady asked me to sit because she had something to tell me. Being polite I sat. She talked for hours about

her life, and it was a fascinating story. I only wish I had had a tape recorder that day. She told me about how she was the first woman in the state to be licensed as a pharmacist and about her three children who had been killed in World War II. She told me all about her husband and the problems and love they shared for many years before he died. After telling me her life story, she said, "Why am I telling you all this?"

"I don't know," I said. "It must be important."

As tears came to her eyes she reached out her hand to mine. "Thank you, rabbi," she said, "you are very kind."

I didn't have the heart to tell her I wasn't a rabbi. "It's been a beautiful life," I said.

She smiled and nodded her head.

## CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

Most of my work over the years has been in search of finding common ground amidst diversity. I do not want to give the impression that it is easy, or that all we need to do is trust and listen in order to get beyond our differences. I do not want to lead anyone to believe that all it takes is reframing the situation, or that everything in the world is situational.

Recently, I was asked to accompany a United States trade group to a South American country to help mediate inter-regional trade. As we were driving along the countryside on a nice paved road looking at small farms and villages, the American woman next to me complained about all the poverty in the country. However, the houses were painted; there was little trash on the roadside, and children were happily playing.

This was not poverty, as I knew it. I told her that the country was rather well-to-do, and I shared some of my experiences in various parts of the world where more than half the population lives by begging and life expectancy was in the thirties because of AIDS. She said, "If I have such a difficult time just riding a bus through this country, how can other Americans ever begin to grasp what the world is like?" This comment from a woman representing her country on a major trade tour was sad. It helped me realize how much must be done if we are to build a world in which people can live together peacefully.

Gaining cross-cultural understanding is essential for life in the modern world. It would be wonderful if we came to accept and love one another. I pray for that, but I would be satisfied if we came to see that our own understanding of others is limited at best and is actu-

ally quite flawed. It will take a lot of patience and respect for the differences of others for the world to move forward in a positive way, but at no time in history has it been as important as now. Concerned Catholics must not only reach out to others. We must also pause and reflect on our own views and see how our cultural vision is very much a part of today's problems in the world. We must come to recognize our cultural dyslexia and cultural blindness and come to realize, unlike President Kennedy, that "they" really believe what "they" believe even when it seems preposterous to us. Even within our church we must listen to those who see things differently from us. Let us not be too quick to judge others of our faith. We may be wrong, and they may be right. Building a multi-cultural community must begin at home, within our family of believers, within our church.

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# Elements of *Spiritual* Leadership

Reverend Roger A. Statnick, Ph.D.



Leadership is an elusive term. Different people lead in different ways, and the same person leads differently in various circumstances. Some people are flexible leaders, successful in many venues. Others seem to be successful only when the conditions for leadership are set in a particular way in specific circumstances. All of these variables make the topic of leadership a slippery issue. We usually recognize a good leader when we follow one, but we sometimes have a difficult time identifying specifically, "What makes a good leader?"

Add to this quandary the question of spiritual leadership, and the picture becomes even more blurry. What distinguishes a spiritual leader from someone who does a good job running and inspiring a group? How is spiritual leadership Catholic and Christian in character?

This essay is a reflection on these questions. It will identify common elements to leadership no matter the personality of the leader or the circumstances in which leadership occurs. There are common threads to leading well, which tie together the different ways and conditions under which leadership occurs. Further on, this essay will treat the issue of spiritual leadership in the Catholic Christian tradition. We will show how the elements of leadership are shaped by the fundamental beliefs, values and relationships of our faith tradition.

The four threads of leadership, no matter the personality or circumstance for leadership, are vision, coherence, strategic decisions and virtues. Let us examine each of these further.

## VISION

Any leader must ask him or herself the question: What kind of a world do I want to create for the people I am leading? At first blush, this might seem to be a rather arrogant and presumptive proposition. No one has that kind of power and control to refashion life as one wills. True, but leadership does propose to refashion life in some way significant to those who follow the leader. A leader directs the group beyond its immediate tasks at hand to see how these tasks can shape reality in some new way. Vision is a dream for a better world, or at least a better corner of the world for those touched by the vision. The leader articulates and represents this dream for the group.

Vision is not about what is now; it is about what can be in the future. A leader must develop a sense among those led that what we have is not enough. We can do better, and our doing can make a difference in how life is perceived and lived. Vision is a reality statement. This is how life ought to be, and we can make that dream a reality through what we say, do and become in this group.

Vision appeals to our need for happiness. Happiness is so misunderstood in our culture. Uncritically, we are told in all sorts of ways that happiness is about material and personal comfort. Financial security, personal affirmation, social contentment and creature comforts tame the threats out of our physical and psychological environments and create happiness. But such a view of happiness does not sustain life for any long haul. It contains life for a while in the illusion that everything can be made to one's own liking. A leader appeals to a different picture in his or her vision.

The vision of leadership is not about making life easier for those who follow. It is about making life better for everyone affected by the efforts to make the vision real. The leader moves everyone to dream a better way to be with each other and to do the work we have at hand. Vision is not about the present but about a still unknown future. As such, one never accomplishes the vision. It is always beyond the present task or community formed around the vision, so that it can inspire and motivate, stretch and challenge, broaden

We can do better, and our doing can make a difference in how life is perceived and lived. Vision is a reality statement.

and deepen the purpose and the meaning for the group's mission.

Vision allows people to see themselves in a new way because they see their lives connected differently. They are part of a world-changing enterprise in some way, and their relationships with others and the actions they undertake contribute to a future they cannot realize themselves. The leader must sustain this type of vision in the midst of managing the present demands and the responsibilities any organization has. No easy task. But without leadership, a group becomes deceived into believing that its plan for programs and projects will sustain its vitality and commitment. A plan may support employment and immediate gratification for those involved, but it cannot sustain a meaningful life and community for them. Only a vision claiming to change the world in a significant way can ask for the personal sacrifice and embracing covenant demanded for authentic meaning and community. The leader is the keeper of the vision.

## COHERENCE

Vision leads to unity. The leader serves this unity by drawing together people and ideas around the vision. In articulating the vision, the leader shows the connections between cherished beliefs, reasoned ideas and plans and actions taken to further the vision. In calling people to follow the vision, the leader creates the opportunity for bonds to form between individuals seeking a better life. This kind of coherence is the fruit of effective leadership.

When theories and techniques are positioned to serve a common purpose, then they begin to become part of a group's worldview. They are more than particular explanations for certain phenomena or particular "know how" to accomplish a task. They are ways of talking about the vision in specific terms and realizing it in concrete actions. They point beyond themselves to

## A leader must be about strategic decisions. These set the direction for the whole enterprise.

provoke further exploration of the vision. No longer sterile abstractions or pure methodologies, the teachings and the practices of a well-led organization interpret people's lives in a meaningful and engaging way.

Likewise, the people begin to identify themselves in terms of the vision of the organization. Each person's functions and achievements are reassessed for their contribution to the common enterprise. It is not enough for the organization to provide a place where one can accomplish his or her own individual goals. The organization's vision must be a substantial part of those goals, and the integrity of each one's life is caught up in contributing to the group's effort at making a better world. The leader then must generate a "buy in" to the common mission generated by the vision. Such an investment comes at the price of each one's personal goals and ambitions to some extent.

To call for such sacrifice, the leader must exhibit a certain personal coherence generated by the group's vision. First, he or she must make the same sacrifice to the cause. Personal goals and ambitions must take a second seat to the vision being presented. Second, the leader must exhibit personal commitment and engagement in the mission. He or she cannot sit back giving orders about how to accomplish the mission. The leader must participate in the mission from his or her appropriate role. Finally, the leader must welcome others into shaping, carrying out and achieving the mission set by the group's vision. We all speak better of what we have a say in formulating, and we all work better for what we have been part of planning to do. Effective leaders welcome others into articulating and carrying out the vision of an organization.

This kind of coherence of ideas and people tests the mettle of both the vision guiding the group and the people who are part of it. On the one hand, is the vision broad and profound enough to demand the sacrifice and the effort called for from the members? Vision that

is too narrow or insignificant will never support group coherence. On the other hand, are the people involved in realizing the group's vision capable of giving themselves to a mission greater than their own ego with its need for security and gratification? Weak and narcissistic individuals cannot participate in a substantial vision that will change the world.

### STRATEGIC DECISIONS AND DIRECTION

The course of an organization is set by the decisions that are made to muster the resources of the group in a particular direction. Not all decisions set direction. Some merely solve a specific problem. Others keep things running in place for a while. Not every decision a leader makes embodies the vision and the mission of the group. Some leaders can get lost in the details of running an organization and rob it of the time, energy and resources needed to advance the mission.

A leader must be about strategic decisions. These set the direction for the whole enterprise. Strategic decisions incorporate certain characteristics that distinguish them from the operational, day-to-day handling of necessary tasks. Rather than feeling like daily chores that must be done, these decisions are intentional and groundbreaking when they are made. A leader does not fall into a strategic decision. He or she consciously sets about it, and others notice its difference from the moment it is announced, even before implementation begins.

Strategic decisions draw attention to themselves because of how they affect a group. For one thing, they implicate many dimensions of the organization in their enactment, and they affect multiple layers in ways that are not always similar or simultaneous. It takes a major effort to mount a strategic decision because a lot of the group's human and material resources will be needed to execute it. A simple work-order will not make it happen. Many operational decisions will only begin to implement the strategy. The point of the decision is beyond any one change in how we do things. The intention is to reorient the entire organization, to change how it thinks about itself and its mission and how it conducts itself in its daily tasks. The immediate effects of a strategic decision often generate conflict and confusion. These need to be managed and addressed, but they should not refocus the intent of the decision. While the plan of execution must be clear and flexible, allowing for adjustments along the way to

deal with unforeseen conditions, it cannot be rewritten at every turn in the road when a new objection arises.

Two temptations face the leader when setting a strategic direction for an organization. He or she may panic when opposition and conflict arise to the “new” ways. Because everyone does not agree with the decision or want to follow its course, the leader may fall into doubts about its correctness. Remember that the goal cannot be seen today. It is down the road and around the bend when the organization holds a different attitude from where it is today. One has to pass by the immediate objections to reorient the group in a new direction. Another temptation is to lose focus on the original intention of the decision. Because the day-to-day problems continue to arise, they can drain energy and divert a leader from the original vision and the long-term change it intends. The leader can easily give in to the immediate demands others place upon him or her and lose the way. He or she capitulates to the easy solution to the prominent problem, the exception requested, or the plea for convenience and so, subtly, almost unconsciously, moves away from the vision’s direction for a better life for all. To set direction, any leader needs to stop and reflect periodically on where the group is and make the needed course corrections along the way.

## VIRTUES

Articulating vision, creating coherence around that vision and implementing decisions to realize the vision require more than a store of organizational knowledge or a hat full of techniques in group dynamics. To lead takes a certain type of person — not a certain type of personality, but a certain quality of person. The leader must embody certain virtues that allow the changes called for by the group’s vision to arise and be sustained. Three qualities in particular are indispensable.

First, a leader must have courage. We are not talking about an action figure here who exhibits outstanding bravery, but a person who can step to the head of the line and be the first to say and do what is needed to incarnate the vision. The courageous person claims the vision as part of his or her identity and asks others to deal with him or her on the terms set by it. Leadership cannot be just a job. It requires a vocation. For the leader, the vision and all it entails provides him or her with the ability to take a risk and to place one’s personal well-being and advancement at its service.

The leader must embody certain virtues that allow the changes called for by the group’s vision to arise and be sustained.

Still, courage is not foolhardiness. The courageous leader does not step out thoughtlessly or impulsively. The courageous leader knows what he or she is doing when it is time for a major shift in the organization. The decision and its implications have been considered from many angles with broad consultation. The courageous leader cares about those affected by a strategic decision. He or she does not set out to upset people or to gain publicity for his or her leadership. The courage of the leader arises out of his or her regard for the welfare of the organization, and doing and saying whatever is necessary to both preserve and advance this welfare. While courage may be admired by others, it cannot seek such acclaim. True virtue arises without much self-consciousness. One could be wrong, and the consequences of a mistake will affect more than the leader’s reputation or ego. The whole group will bear the consequences. The truly courageous person, while confident in his or her own and others’ abilities and intelligence, is humble and somewhat apprehensive when he or she leads others in a new direction. The common good is at stake in any significant decision, and the leader is called to serve that good. Courage in leadership is rooted in the humble recognition that life is larger and more unpredictable than anyone can control. Yet, despite this fact, the courageous leader cares enough for those who follow the vision to step out with confidence in them and oneself, so that everyone’s life has a chance at a vision that is greater than the present limits in which we all live.

The second personal quality a leader must exhibit is fortitude. Anyone can have a great moment when the best of oneself in the right circumstances brings out the best in others. Leadership is not a job for a moment, and the leader must be a person who can sustain his or her leadership with the group over time.

**When people meet their leader, they need to know that they have encountered someone with definition who wants to respect them by grappling with their ideas, opinions, attitudes and loyalties.**

When a person encounters his or her leader, it should not feel like nailing Jell-O to the wall, or falling into a room of Styrofoam balls so that wherever you land you are cushioned and enveloped. When people meet their leader, they need to know that they have encountered someone with definition who wants to respect them by grappling with their ideas, opinions, attitudes and loyalties. A leader marks a relationship with others by what he or she stands for and how he or she engages others on those terms.

There are two ways leaders might be tempted to avoid developing the fortitude needed to lead well. One is to charm the group. Using flattery and gestures that please others so no one raises any objections or suggestions puts others off from engaging their leader. They may leave the moment happy and encouraged, but they later realize their dissatisfaction and frustration. Another way leaders avoid dealing with their constituencies is by heavy-handed, autocratic pronouncements and demands. The message is sent that there is no room for another voice or another way here. The relationship is determined by terms the leader has set, and so no free flow of information or personal dynamics will influence the way the leader deals with the group.

Fortitude allows the strength of the leader's own person to convince and direct the organization in open and dialogical relationships. Weak leaders are threatened by such an approach. They need to manipulate and control the group for fear that their inadequacies will be displayed. The leader with fortitude knows that he or she lacks certain skills, knowledge or personality traits that will be needed from time to time in the group's progress. However, instead of hiding these behind the power of one's position, the strong leader allows others to provide for his or her inadequacies, without diminishing the leader's position as the guardian of the group's vision, coherence and direction. Fortitude is a quality that shows that leadership is

necessary for any group to thrive, but dependent upon the strengths within the group itself to be successful.

Finally, the effective leader must be a person of perseverance. Because of the many demands that come to bear on any organization today, anyone can become easily overwhelmed. To get free of this dilemma, one looks for the quick fix, the easy out or the single victory. The leader needs to develop another way to find satisfaction and signs of success.

As keeper of the vision, the leader cannot expect many quick results from his or her point of view. He or she must be able to put each issue, each problem, each internal or external conflict into the vision's perspective and not make too much or too little of it.

How does the point at hand contribute or not to the overall purpose and mission of the group? Does its impact matter in the long haul to the vision we hold? How does the group focus and free up energy for the mission without getting lost in any one of the myriad problems before it? The leader must be willing to tackle these questions and keep them in the forefront of any discussion of daily dilemmas.

Such a long view can drain any leader. Perseverance must be sustained by signs of progress that offer encouragement. Here the leader needs to read the subtleties of the organization. Listen for what is said in the unsolicited remarks or informal conversations that occur when the group meets. Look to how others make decisions in the organization. Reflect back to compare how people operated a few months or years ago and how they function now. These subtle signs of change reveal how the vision is taking root in the organization and shifting its priorities and customs. A leader uses sandpaper to reshape a group more often than an ax, and so perseverance is needed to support the slow degree and rate of change. Cultures move slowly, but they do move. The leader needs to accept the group for what it is, call it to be more by the vision it claims and guide the process of getting to the future. This often seems like a desert journey, but along the way, he or she discovers manna and water to keep going.

#### THE SPIRITUAL LEADER

In the previous section, we presented the elements of vision, coherence, direction and virtues needed to lead any group or organization. However, when we turn to the question of *spiritual* leadership, we can often abandon this foundation. After all, now we are about

transcendent truths and realities. Now the rules are different; the dynamics are divine; the needs are removed from the limitations and the foibles of human life. Grace prevails and supplies what is needed.

Such misconceptions have led to serious mistakes and even tragedies among religious leaders. The recent child sexual abuse crisis in the church provides evidence of some of this distorted thinking. Some thought that clergy leadership was not accountable to those under their care to lead well and effectively. In God's name, it seemed that two standards of conduct were allowed, and the results of this dualism for some have been shattered vision and shattered lives, fractures and disunity, aimlessness and self-absorption and disappointment at the low standards for church leadership. We cannot claim our Catholic faith tradition as the justification for such a position.

That tradition stands on two fundamental movements of grace shown to us in the God definitively revealed in Jesus become the Christ. These are *incarnation* and *transformation*. The Incarnation claims that all the elements of our human condition are part of the faithful condition as well. A person cannot step out of his or her life to live with and for God. Rather, a person must step more deeply into what life entails to discover the faithful God present and active in one's midst. Nevertheless, our tradition does not simply absorb whatever life brings or people make of it. It calls for the transformation of selfishness and human destructiveness by the redeeming grace shown and released by Christ's death and resurrection. This transformation is neither some idyllic restoration to some primordial time of perfection, nor the chaos of unbridged impulse or personal interests. It is the careful process of conversion that occurs when people encounter God on the terms set by our Catholic Christian tradition.

Let us now revisit the elements of leadership from the perspective of this faith tradition. With trust in our incarnate and transforming Lord, our aim is to see how the elements of leadership come to be informed by our faith to serve and advance the tradition we hold.

## A FAITH VISION

While, as we said above, the leader is the keeper of the vision, he or she cannot claim to be its proprietor. Vision is the result of many people's efforts to articulate their hearts' desires in a common enterprise. When

A person cannot step out of his or her life to live with and for God. Rather, a person must step more deeply into what life entails to discover the faithful God present and active in one's midst.

it coalesces, it is a gift, a moment of graced convergence that unites by calling each one beyond him or herself to a greater interest.

The Catholic Christian vision articulates God's interest for human beings and the world. In gospel language, it is the message of the Kingdom of God, shown in Jesus' life, ministry and teaching. A spiritual leader in this tradition must incorporate the characteristics of this vision into his or her efforts to guide an organization. Only a Kingdom vision is large and substantial enough to sustain a Christian group and to revitalize it from time to time. This staying power is built into the very nature of the Kingdom as displayed in the scriptures. Let us examine its characteristics.

First, the Kingdom of God is all-inclusive. God's claims allow for no boundaries. Natural phenomenon and human beings, public life and personal concerns, sex and sexuality, food and festivals, good and evil, virtue and sin, tragedy and triumph, the social, economic and political realms, all can bear fruit in faith. Spiritual leadership must be conversant enough with these various dimensions to understand what they each bring to the table to enrich both life and the faith vision of that life. Rather than denying or rejecting life's contradictions and conflicts, a Kingdom vision integrates these on God's terms. That is why the Catholic Church in the better moments of its long history tries to inculcate the faith when it preaches, teaches and celebrates. Only human culture can embody the full scope and depth of God's Kingdom vision. Anything less is either too superficial or too restrictive for faithful living. The challenge for today's spiritual leader is to incorporate the vision of faith into the very fiber of the community's life without demanding monolithic conformity and without the dissolution of self-contained individualism. How to be an organic whole yet with various forms and expressions is the challenge for religious vision today.

**Loyalty must finally rest in God and not in personal indebtedness or organizational patronage. Value is determined by fidelity to the Kingdom's ways and not by achievements or advancement.**

Second, the Kingdom is *God's* rule. While this sounds rather prosaic, it is terribly difficult to realize. Any leader feels responsible for the group under his or her charge. The natural instinct arising from such a sense of responsibility is to take charge, to guard the group's welfare and to protect it from dangers. In the interest of these legitimate concerns, the leader can often become the center of attention and the source of direction. If left unchecked, such a focus clouds over God's Kingdom with the attempted dominance of lesser kingdoms.

Spiritual leaders need consciously to focus the group away from themselves and onto the source of their leadership, God's choice. They are the lenses through which others can see how God is acting in their midst and the world. They are the instruments of the vision, not its objects. God is the source and intention of all leadership in faith. So inspiration must incite holy awe, wondering about God's ways among us, and not admiration for personal talents or charisms. Loyalty must finally rest in God and not in personal indebtedness or organizational patronage. Value is determined by fidelity to the Kingdom's ways and not by achievements or advancement. Spiritual leadership has to allow God to rule by assuming a certain detachment from how the vision expands and penetrates dimensions of the group's life in unexpected ways. The spiritual leaders themselves should expect to be challenged and changed by the vision they keep, for their leadership is authentic only if it stands under the vision and responds to its many facets.

Third, the Kingdom of God gives privilege to the least. The scriptures name sinners, tax collectors and children as the chosen of the Kingdom. These have no claim on God by their own merits. Rather, God claims them as God's own precisely in and through their need. What God claims also places a responsibility on those

who would follow God. "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Mt. 25:40) There is a kinship between our God and the least of this world that creates a new Kingdom of peace, justice and light. Spiritual leaders must recognize and serve this relationship in their vision for the community.

Finally, the Kingdom of God is already present in our midst, but not yet fully realized. There is an incompleteness to the vision of a spiritual leader that cannot be fulfilled. The limits of human capacities and the sins of human selfishness always bear upon efforts to realize the vision. The Kingdom is God's offspring, and spiritual leaders are simply the nannies of this life, providing some of the means for nurturance, growth and correction of the vision. But this job will never be complete, and its successes are never ends in themselves, but stepping-stones to the next phase of the Kingdom's manifestation in human history. When its final consummation will be and precisely what it will be like in concrete form is beyond anyone's capacities to imagine. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1) Spiritual leaders of a Kingdom vision walk by faith, and so there is always an unfinished character to their work. Their vision creates hope, and God brings it to fulfillment.

#### UNITY IN THE SPIRIT

Our faith professes that Christ's transformation in death and resurrection released the Holy Spirit into the world. This Spirit enlightens us to the truth, and it binds us to one another as the Body of Christ in the world. Spiritual leadership must foster this Spirit in our midst. How is this done?

On the one hand, the Spirit will not be contained by our presuppositions and habits. The transforming power of resurrected life creates possibilities and new relationships never before considered. The spiritual leader must be open to this wisdom, however, and from whomever it comes. Such a leader encourages people to share their ideas, opinions and insights as possible sources of divine wisdom. He or she looks for new ways of connecting people to foster the work of the Kingdom. Out of these connections come bonds of unity as people discover a common mind and heart in Christ through undertaking the tasks at hand in faith.

Unity in the Spirit is generated by a shared mission guided by the vision of the Kingdom. The spiritual

leader focuses the tasks at hand in terms of the Kingdom and then allows those undertaking these charges to do their job. The doing of the Kingdom creates the Kingdom community. Its bonds are welded by what the mission calls us to do together. Its standards for relationships are set by the gospel. The spiritual leader must keep these elements in the forefront of the group to prevent its losing its faithful focus. Naturally, when people like working together, human connections are made. Only if the work is inspired by the Spirit and its Kingdom vision can these connections avoid becoming a clique or a self-absorbed and self-protective support group. Just as naturally, personalities come to play in how people work together and what they expect from each other. To avoid these dynamics from determining what we do and how we do it, the spiritual leader must hold up the Kingdom's vision and the Spirit's call as the criteria for mission.

To do so, he or she must know the tradition formed by the Spirit to embody the Kingdom's vision. The Catholic communion has always valued the intellectual dimension of faith. Leadership should not eschew this dimension but represent it. How else can it provide focus for the vision that assures its authenticity? To know the tradition is to understand how God's people followed the vision of the Kingdom in the past and how they misunderstood its meaning and were misled at times. While the spiritual leader must embrace the tradition emotionally to be one with the people formed in faith, he or she must also grasp and engage it intellectually. How else is one to know the full scope of possibilities opened by God's revelation, or the limits placed on human ingenuity by the inclusivity, holy rule of grace, preference for the least and the incomplete character of this vision?

The Spirit's unity is created on definite terms set by the tradition. To foster this communion, one must know, understand and apply these terms to the situation at hand. This demands careful study and reflection on the faith tradition and the conditions of life today. To bypass this exercise is to risk distorting the vision of God's Kingdom. Powers other than God work to shape our desires, and unless we understand how the tradition confronted these in the past, we are very vulnerable to their influence. The terms of the Kingdom become camouflage for other agenda. So inclusivity translates into political correctness. God's rule becomes a justification for the divine right of authority without question. The privilege of the least converts

**The spiritual leader focuses the tasks at hand in terms of the Kingdom and then allows those undertaking these charges to do their job.**

to "do-good-ism" or "my pet cause." And the incomplete character of the Kingdom allows for excuses for simple laziness, incompetence or cowardice.

Unity in the Spirit demands freedom to explore new ways to remain faithful and restraint to assure that these ways are of God. Only ongoing study of the faith tradition can keep a person on this delicate path. A spiritual leader must be a student of the tradition to show others the way.

#### PASTORAL JUDGMENT

Perhaps the most difficult element of spiritual leadership — as with any kind of leadership — is how to translate vision into ordinary reality, into the way people go about their daily lives. The language of the Kingdom can inspire and unite, but what does it look like when it shapes attitudes and actions? The translation occurs through the pastoral judgments made to embody the Kingdom vision in the way we live together. For the spiritual leader, significant pastoral judgments are strategic for the mission. They must be understood and undertaken, if the group's purpose and meaning are to continue to flourish.

Such judgment involves two capacities in the spiritual leader. His or her intelligence must be brought to bear on the situation at hand. Through good pastoral judgments the present realities are interpreted by the truths and the values embodied in the Catholic Christian tradition. In addition, the spiritual leader's own heart is exposed through the pastoral judgments exercised. Where his or her commitments lie mark the relationships that shape the character of this judgment. Unless the covenant with God and God's people is the clear foundation for the decisions that give direction to the community, these judgments will lack authenticity. Unless intelligibility is displayed in terms that have both practical reference to the world and spiritual ref-

**Given our culture and the notion of leadership that it sometimes presumes, a person can be tempted to adopt the most efficient, pragmatic or popular position to lead a group.**

erence from the faith tradition, the credibility of these judgments will be in question.

What are the criteria for intelligibility in pastoral judgments? Certainly, the spiritual leader should use methods of fact-finding and analysis from many disciplines to uncover the life conditions in which the community operates and advances its mission. To deny these dimensions is to contradict the incarnate character of grace. A spiritual leader cannot presume, out of hand, that the empirical picture is wrong and must change. Rather, he or she must place this empirical reality in relationship with the picture drawn from the history of the tradition and its doctrinal tenets and ask how the vision of the Kingdom is served in this circumstance. Given our culture and the notion of leadership that it sometimes presumes, a person can be tempted to adopt the most efficient, pragmatic or popular position to lead a group. The spiritual leader is called to adopt the most faithful course, faithful to the God incarnate in the current conditions of human living who is working to transform their sin and destructiveness. Prospectively, the intelligibility of such a course may not be unquestionably conclusive, but it will display a reasonableness that addresses the situation with characteristics of the Kingdom, rather than denying it or condemning it without engaging its questions and concerns. The spiritual leader must see that this reasonableness is articulated for both the community of faith and those addressed by its mission. While everyone may not accept its cogency, respect for others requires the spiritual leader to display the intelligibility of decisions that guide the group. To do otherwise is to contradict the Kingdom vision in the very efforts to implement it.

But pastoral judgment stands on more than intelligence. The spiritual leader has to want what God wants for God's people when he or she makes decisions that shape their lives. This desire for covenant in faith is not easy to sustain, as the history of Israel clearly displays. Without thinking it had gone astray, the nation often broke covenant with God and each other. This history shows that our desires are easily co-opted by pressing needs and fears — financial resources, constituencies' wishes, prestige, advancement. Under such temptations, we lose focus on the Kingdom qualities we want to embody. Bias creeps into our judgment to favor some lesser object of our desire, and we, in turn, sculpt our reasoning to fit this end. So we "fudge" the budget, or select the person who will benefit our image, or avoid certain controversial issues to play it "safe" for our career. We twist our thinking and realign our alliances for purposes other than God's own.

For one's pastoral judgment to remain true and faithful, the spiritual leader periodically needs some therapy for his or her desires. This comes in many forms that need to interact with each other to keep a person authentic. Pulling away from our role for a while and taking stock of what we are doing and how we are doing it can allow our judgment to clear. Seeking counsel from trusted colleagues and friends not involved in our community can free the mind and heart to speak candidly. In this way we find a sounding board to listen to ourselves and evaluate our thinking and the loyalties behind it. Finally, good pastoral judgment is the fruit of prayer. Here we encounter God and see ourselves as God sees us. For the spiritual leader, prayer is like a two-way mirror, providing a view of the divine mystery in our life and world that on the other side reflects back to us a self-image. Genuine prayer looks at both sides of the glass and faces the incongruities it sees when comparing the pictures. From this perspective, we can see our biases and counter them with grace-filled integrity. A spiritual director helps keep the glass clean for us and support the divine call to conversion.

#### DISCIPLESHIP

Leadership is not just a series of functions a person performs in an organization. It is also the expression of oneself in these functions. If a person leads in any way, his or her character shows forth in the performance of one's duties and, in turn, the character of the leader

rubs off on the community being led, providing it with a certain self-definition as a group.

Earlier, we spoke of the qualities of character needed to lead well: courage, fortitude and perseverance. In spiritual leadership, these virtues take on an additional dimension that transforms leading well into leading well faithfully. Such is the character of a leader who is a disciple of the Lord.

Christian discipleship is about a particular type of relationship with the Lord Jesus. The disciple is distinguished by this relationship because it holds priority over all other relationships that constitute one's life. Without discipleship, the spiritual dimension is lost, for it is the usual way in the Christian tradition to identify and connect the divine reality to the human condition. Discipleship makes the faith both personal and communal as the character of this relationship shows, and it is the foundation on which the mission is constructed and sustained.

What constitutes Christian discipleship? First, the discipleship relationship is initiated by the Lord. We are called to be followers; we do not choose this position. While much of American culture posits voluntary associations as the way one fulfills many personal needs, including religious ones, discipleship places a claim on a person that he or she can choose to accept or reject, but cannot choose to create. Secondly, in discipleship, one is called to a personal relationship to the Lord Jesus. The call to follow is not simply a matter of learning a body of teachings or assuming a set of practices as part of one's lifestyle. These matters gain their meaning and purpose from the fundamental claim the Lord has made on a person's life. If one does not recognize, accept and commit to this relationship created by the call, everything that comes from discipleship is at best superficial and at worst inauthentic. Third, the Christian disciple always remains a disciple no matter what other roles he or she plays in the community. The disciple never rises to parity with the Lord, nor does he or she rise above others in discipleship. While other roles must be assumed for the order of the community and the carrying out of its mission, these always arise from and return to discipleship for their foundation. Finally, in the Catholic Christian tradition, discipleship assumes a communal dimension intrinsic to its nature. Relationship to the Lord as a follower brings with it relationship to other followers. The community is formed by discipleship, sustained by it, and receives its unique character through it. The horizontal and the

Spiritual leadership is always instrumental leadership aimed at fostering the discipleship of others as a leader lives out his or her own in this role.

vertical dimensions of faith are tied together because the relationship to the Lord in discipleship simultaneously creates a web of relationships to other disciples, to the world in which they live, and to those still to recognize and accept their call to follow.

For the spiritual leader, discipleship is the source of the courage, fortitude and perseverance needed to carry out his or her role. These virtues are not simply personal attributes in this context. They are manifestations of grace in leadership that comes from following the Lord as one leads the community. Spiritual leadership is always instrumental leadership aimed at fostering the discipleship of others as a leader lives out his or her own discipleship in this role. Discipleship assures that the vision of the Kingdom, the unity of the Spirit and the pastoral judgments that incarnate these realities bear upon the leader as much as those who follow, for before the Lord, all are equal. As Saint Augustine said so well in his homily on the bishop's role:

*I must distinguish carefully between two aspects of the role the Lord has given me, a role that demands a rigorous accountability, a role based on the Lord's greatness rather than on my own merit. The first aspect is that I am a Christian; the second, that I am a leader. I am a Christian for my own sake, whereas I am a leader for your sake; the fact that I am a Christian is to my own advantage, but I am a leader for your advantage.* (Sermon 46, 2: CCL 41, 530)

A spiritual leader cannot separate these two aspects of the relationship. One cannot be "for" a community unless one is "with" the community for his or her own spiritual advantage, and the character of Christian discipleship keeps this connection clear for

all parties.

While the roles one assumes throughout a lifetime may change, discipleship is ongoing. This relationship must be fed and nourished, if it is to continue. Prayer and worship, fellowship and communication are the food of discipleship. These dynamics must be a part of any role one assumes in the church — clergy or lay, formal or informal — to assure that the person exercising the position does so faithfully. Without sustaining discipleship in Christ, a person's spiritual leadership becomes hollow, for he or she becomes a mere functionary in the community.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

If it is a tough world for leaders, it is an even tougher world for those wanting to be spiritual leaders in the church. So many competing forces and loyalties affect the community that its leaders often feel pulled in many directions, all of which sometime seem legitimate and necessary. Ordination and/or professional education are not enough to clear the way for effective spiritual leadership. A constellation of elements comes into play for a person to carry out this service in various offices, roles and venues. Not all spiritual leaders are the same, but all spiritual leadership calls for a vision of God's Kingdom that unites people in Christ's Spirit to transform themselves and the world through the work of faithful disciples.

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#### SLEEP AND ITS EFFECTS

Recent research has shown that good sleep helps learning, increases life span and is associated with quality of life, according to a report authored by Mark Greer in *Monitor on Psychology* for July/August, 2004. One of its benefits is that it allows the brain to store new information into long-term memory. A leading sleep researcher, James Maas, Ph.D., of Cornell University, offers the following steps to help people to get a better sleep.

- Develop a consistent bedtime routine. Performing the same routines just before bedtime signals to the body that it's time to rest.
- Wake up without an alarm clock.
- Avoid caffeine after 2:00 p.m.
- Avoid alcohol within three hours of bedtime.
- Try going to bed earlier each night than you have normally done.
- Take a nap of no longer than 20 minutes during the day.

(Source: *Monitor on Psychology*, July/August, 2004, pp. 60-62.)

# Discernment Chapters of *Complex Affairs*

Barbara Valuckas, S.S.N.D., Ph.D.

Chapters, the highest decision-making bodies of their congregations when in session, are evolving along with their congregations as they travel toward unknown and uncertain futures. So what does it mean for a Chapter to engage in dynamic communal discernment in this context of complexity?

A religious congregation can be thought of as a complex, adaptive, self-organizing system. So, some of the wisdom and the concepts that relate to such systems can shed light on the dynamics of a Chapter for a religious congregation as a system in change.

Three conditions for self-organization to occur are: the presence of a container, the existence of difference within the organization and the possibility of transforming exchange that is capable of bridging the differences.

The container holds the system together while the change occurs. For religious congregations, this container is more of an internal “attractor” that holds the members together. The container includes the congregation’s shared “deep story,” its shared understandings and commitments as expressed in its congregational documents and its shared faith tradition. This container rests within the larger container of that faith tradition and in the still larger containers of the world and the cosmos. Within this container, differences in individual member beliefs, commitments, values, priorities, cultures, etc., provide the potential for change within the



If Chapter participants do not know how God's Spirit is moving in each other's hearts, then it will be difficult to intuit how God's Spirit is moving in the group as a whole.

system. But change depends upon the third condition: the congregation's capacity for transforming exchange. Communal discernment and consensus building are two processes that facilitate a transforming openness to God's imagination for a congregation and transforming exchange among its members for the sake of the greater good of the whole.

#### COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT

First, let us examine the communal discernment dimension. What are its implications for Chapter process and content? With regard to process, both faith-sharing and consensus-building are key elements.

**Implications for process.** Faith-sharing is essential because in order to engage in communal discernment, participants need to become spiritually acquainted. If Chapter participants do not know how God's Spirit is moving in each other's hearts, then it will be difficult to intuit how God's Spirit is moving in the group as a whole. For this reason, a strong commitment to regular faith-sharing both during pre-Chapter preparation and at Chapter sessions themselves is central. Regular faith-sharing invariably results in the deepened trust level that is so needed to engage in the type of dialogue that enables Chapter participants to articulate what they can say together in the Spirit on behalf of the congregation.

Faith-sharing is also an expression of apostolic prayer. During it, each participant brings his or her lived apostolic experience to the Scriptures, reflects on what happens in that graced interaction and shares that with other participants, usually in a small table grouping. The response is reverent listening to the way that the Word of

God is bearing fruit in the life of each person who shares. It is not a time of lecture, homily, discussion, argument or decision-making. There is no need for note-taking. What is shared in the group remains held in confidence by the members of that group. Daily Chapter prayer in the form of faith-sharing prepares the spiritual ground for communal discernment.

Consensus-building skills are also important if the discernment is to be truly communal. Consensus-building usually takes a substantial investment of time and always depends upon highly developed listening and speaking skills. In Chapters, it needs to be reserved for the most important questions that the congregation is discerning. But, if the discernment is truly a communal discernment, then it can not just mean that everyone is involved in the discussion; it should also mean that the outcome is reflective of the legitimate concerns of the participants and that the common good is a significant value in the outcome. More about consensus later in this article.

**Implications for content.** If it is true that all discernment begins with the identification of the question(s) to be discerned, then it follows that a significant part of the preparation for a Chapter of communal discernment involves the congregation in coming to convergence around these questions. It means that the heart of the Chapter agenda could look more like a series of questions than like a series of propositions or proposals. An agenda of discernment questions arrived at through pre-Chapter consensus-building processes can be a significant change from past practice for many congregations.

It also suggests the dynamic nature of discernment. In looking back over twenty-five years as either a Chapter participant or facilitator, I can appreciate how Chapter matters have evolved toward greater complexity as has the world in general. A conceptual model that has helped to put some words on this evolution is one developed by psychologist Ronald Heifetz in his work *Leadership Without Easy Answers*. Heifetz describes three types of situations facing leadership today:

Type I situations are those for which the problem/issue is clear, the solution is known and the role of leadership is to decide to apply the solution to the problem/issue; in other words, to take a clear action. He uses medical examples to illustrate his types. A Type I situation would be represented by a patient who is diagnosed with a kidney stone. The patient's condition is clear; the procedures for treating or removing kidney stones are known. The role of the physician

(leader) is to implement the procedure.

A parallel to this in the history of Chapters is the proposal Chapter. Prior to Vatican II, when religious life in North America had peaked in a certain kind of stability, proposals often related to changes in the minute details of internal life or daily order. After Vatican II, proposals more often took the form of specific congregational initiatives that related either to the inner life of the congregation (renewal) or to its outer life (ministerial initiatives).

Proposal Chapters predominated at a time when parliamentary procedure or other methods of debate were the primary mode of Chapter deliberation. There were close votes; there were winners and losers. Proposals were helpful because they called for action around clear solutions to known problems. They are still helpful for Type I problems/issues even when the mode of decision-making has evolved from debate to communal discernment. Communal discernment can still occur around questions of whether or not to implement a proposed solution or, perhaps, which of several proposals to implement.

## TYPE II SITUATIONS

But Heifetz maintains that leaders today are facing situations that are increasingly Types II or III. Chapters, as leadership groups, are recognizing this as well in the increasing complexity of the questions they are identifying, and they are evolving new processes to reflect this.

A **Type II** situation is one in which, while the question may be clear, the solution is either unknown at the outset or dependent upon many factors that become clear only over time.

Heifetz uses the medical example of a patient who is diagnosed with a heart condition.

While the condition is clear, it is not clear whether the condition is caused by stress, weight or lifestyle choices such as smoking, etc. Not only is the needed action less clear than that for the kidney stone, but the action also is dependent upon the patient's ability and willingness to experiment with changing some of the variables. The physician cannot implement a simple procedure but must engage in a series of dialogues and experiments along with the patient until the solution and needed course of action become clear.

Chapters also are facing more Type II situations. In many congregations, for instance, the issue of commu-

When a U.S. congregation includes in its Chapter agenda the question, “What can we say together about the death penalty?”, it is acknowledging a Type II discernment.

nity life has been a recurring concern. The “problem” is known and acknowledged, but the solution to the problem is not so immediately apparent. Judging from several Chapters I have recently facilitated, community life may well be one of the “heart conditions” of many congregations. Pre-Chapter dialogue often involves the membership in looking at the many facets of the issue. Chapter leadership is often exercised in discerning and then articulation of direction statements rather than solutions. These congregational directions then become invitations and challenges to the membership to experiment with the deep changes needed to evolve to a healthier condition of community life. Future Chapters then need to reflect on what is learned from these initiatives and to use what is learned to focus the next initiatives.

Looking at the larger systems of which congregations are a part, their efforts to come to corporate stances around specific justice issues represent another kind of Type II situation. When a U.S. congregation includes in its Chapter agenda the question, “What can we say together about the death penalty?”, it is acknowledging a Type II discernment. The “problem” of capital punishment is known. But the solution, e.g., what that particular congregation can say together with regard to the problem, is unknown at the outset, especially if some members of the congregation are also members of families of murder victims and have conflicted feelings about the death penalty. Extensive pre-Chapter theological reflection culminating in Chapter dialogue can arrive at a consensus response in the form of a corporate stance. As with the patient with the heart problem, the solution in Type II situations usually involves deep changes in the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of the persons who collaborate in evolving it. These deep changes then impel the members toward the specific actions implied by their solution. Specific actions are generally more appropriate to

The leadership (read Chapter) role in Type III situations is to invite membership into a cycle of deep learning and deep change understood as a commitment to a continuous cycle of reflection and action.

post-Chapter implementation than to the work of the Chapter itself, especially if congregational diversity requires a variety of ways of implementing an agreed-upon direction.

#### TYPE III—SITUATIONS OF PROFOUND UNCERTAINTY

As religious congregations experience the passing away of models of religious life that characterized past decades and enter a period of conscious transition toward unknown futures, Chapters are increasingly facing Type III situations, or situations of profound uncertainty.

Heifetz describes Type III situations as those that are so complex that the problems/ issues/questions themselves are unclear or unknown. And so leadership involves the willingness to risk walking into the unknown and to discover the questions themselves as a part of the journey.

Heifetz uses the medical example of a patient who is diagnosed with cancer. At the outset, it is not clear whether the cancer will respond to chemotherapy or will be terminal. So neither the doctor nor the patient knows whether the question they are facing is about surviving cancer or about preparation for death. The patient and the doctor must travel a long road together with each being responsive to each new clarity as it emerges. This includes the ability to notice new and sometimes unexpected signs and to invent new responses to some freshly discovered aspects of the patient's condition.

Organizationally, this approach is described by Margaret Wheatley in her book *Turning To One Another* when she says:

*We weren't trained to admit we don't know. Most of us were taught to sound certain and confident, to state our opinion as if it were true. We haven't been rewarded for being confused. Or for asking more questions*

*than giving quick answers. We've also spent many years listening to others mainly to determine whether we agree with them or not. We don't have time or interest to sit and listen to those who think differently than we do.*

*But the world now is quite perplexing. We no longer live in those sweet, slow days when life felt predictable, when we actually knew what to do next. We live in a complex world; we often don't know what's going on, and we won't be able to understand its complexity unless we spend more time in not knowing" (p. 34).*

Similarly, when religious congregations raise Chapter discernment questions such as: "What is our meaning and identity as a congregation in the post-modern world?" or, "What is the viability of religious life? Of our congregation?" they are naming Type III questions for communal discernment. They are admitting their state of unknowing and allowing, even inviting, that unknowing to carry them into prayer and dialogue.

These are not the types of questions that are amenable to proposals or even to directional statements. They require a preparation and a dialogue of a different order. The leadership (read Chapter) role in Type III situations is to invite membership into a cycle of deep learning and deep change understood as a commitment to a continuous cycle of reflection and action. The types of Chapter acts that result from this kind of activity will be very different from those that address Type I or Type II questions.

#### "QUICK-FIX" RESPONSES

Heifetz cautions that there is often a temptation for groups that are uncomfortable with complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty to push prematurely a Type II or Type III question into a Type I question in order to have the satisfaction of a "quick fix." The "quick fix" response can provide short-term satisfaction at the expense of grappling with the long-term and deeper issues. A variation of this temptation is to avoid the Type II and III questions altogether and to settle for a "Type I only" Chapter by default. "Type I only" Chapters are often defended with the rationale: "We don't want a Chapter that is all talk; we want action!"

The three types are meant to be understood as relating to different levels of complexity, not superiority. In preparing for and implementing Chapters then,

it is important to grasp the types of situations/questions that the congregation is facing and to match the level of discernment to the level of the situation/question. A wrong match could be unhelpful regardless of the type of question involved.

Just as the focus of the discernment shifts with the nature of the issues that are being faced, the facilitation processes and tools that are most appropriate will differ depending upon the type of discernment needed.

Ultimately, it is the role of Chapters to discover what they can say together for the greater common good on behalf of the congregation. This challenges congregations preparing for Chapters to engage first in divergent, open-ended processes that surface the differences within the membership and then to engage in convergent processes that search for creative ways to be and act for the common good and that honor differing, legitimate concerns. In the end, the Chapter must come to closure around its response to the questions it has identified for its discernment, even if the closure is the identification of a Type III response and commitment.

## CONSENSUS-BUILDING PROCESSES

Consensus-building processes at their best are very helpful here. Not consensus misunderstood as watering down ideas to the lowest common denominator, but rather understood as creative searching to find a way forward that honors the differing, legitimate concerns within the group. Some examples of creative consensus may help here.

- In *Getting to Yes*, authors Roger Fisher and William Ury give the example of two people studying in the library. They each take turns alternately opening and closing the window as the tension mounts. The librarian, hearing the disturbance, asks each one why they need the window open or closed. One has a cold and needs to avoid being in a draft. The other needs fresh air to study. The librarian then closes the disputed window and opens a window in a nearby, unoccupied room so there will be fresh air without a draft. This is the essence of consensus. It involves investing enough time and quality of listening to discover the legitimate concerns underneath positions and then to work creatively to find a solution that honors seemingly different concerns. In this instance, each of the students was able to support, not just “live with” the solution because it honored a legitimate need that had

**Ultimately, it is the role of Chapters to discover what they can say together for the greater common good on behalf of the congregation.**

been expressed.

- Another example: The *New York Times* (March 20, 1999, p. 10) recounted an episode that occurred at Georgetown University. In the course of repainting the classrooms, the crucifixes were taken down from the wall. In recognition of the growing ethnic and denominational diversity of the student body, the administration made the decision not to replace them. However, in recognition of the Catholic identity of the university, a group of students pressed for the replacement of the crucifixes. Some long dialogues with lots of listening occurred. The solution was to commission artists from different ethnic groups and denominations to depict the crucifixion. This enabled the university to honor its Catholic identity and the multiethnic, multi-denominational nature of the student body, as well.

Neither the hypothetical library story nor the actual incident at Georgetown resulted in a watered-down compromise. On the contrary, the eventual solutions deserved the support they received because they honored the seemingly diverse but legitimate needs of the persons involved in the dialogue.

Even if a congregation has come to consensus around a question or questions to be discerned at the Chapter, the type of corresponding commitment has greater ownership if the Chapter has come to consensus around the response to the question as well. Some ways of sorting out the different types of questions and corresponding commitments can be helped by questions such as the following:

### Type I

- We believe that we are being called by the Holy Spirit to make a concrete response to the following clear issue ....

The concrete response can be ....

We are committed to this response because ....

### Type II

- We believe that we are being called by the Holy Spirit to a season of testing possible responses to the

**While performance goals are useful for doing easy, familiar tasks (Type I) they tend to trigger our fear of not measuring up to expectations when we are faced with difficult or new challenges (Types II and III).**

following clear issue ....

Some possible responses/initiatives we can test in the next X number of years are ....

We are committed to testing these initiatives because ....

### Type III

• We believe that we are being called by the Holy Spirit to deep learning and deep conversion around ....

We are committed to this learning and this conversion because ....

As increased numbers of congregations include Type III questions for their discernment and commit to corresponding congregational directions, they will find that these goals are more like "learning goals" rather than "performance goals." The literature on self-organizing systems points out that performance goals are preoccupied with end results. This can evoke a tendency to play it safe, do tasks within our capacity and avoid mistakes. While performance goals are useful for doing easy, familiar tasks (Type I), they tend to trigger our fear of not measuring up to expectations when we are faced with difficult or new challenges (Types II and III). They create an unsafe place for people to learn.

Learning goals use results, not as statements of self-worth but as tools to evaluate progress toward the goals. Rather than unsettling us, new and difficult tasks motivate us to take on increasingly greater challenges. When we focus on learning, we operate less at the mercy of others and become the source of our own creativity and initiative.

### CONCLUSION

Processes such as faith sharing and authentic consensus-building can be considered as the best types of transforming exchanges that are integral to a congrega-

tion's ability to self-organize in response to complexity and uncertainty. They enable Chapter participants to notice the patterns of deep desires that surface through prayer and dialogue, the very desires that reveal what is in God's imagination for the congregation. They strengthen a congregation's ability to adapt by deepening mutual trust and trust in the action of God's Spirit. They focus the congregation's attention on the larger wholes of which the congregation is a part and call the congregation to the greater common good.

However, engaging in communal discernment and consensus-building around increasingly complex questions will call congregations and their Chapters to embrace deep learning and deep change and to resist temptations to oversimplify complexity in order to achieve quick and easy solutions. The Holy Spirit hovers over the chaotic waters of complexity, as well as over the pools of simplicity.

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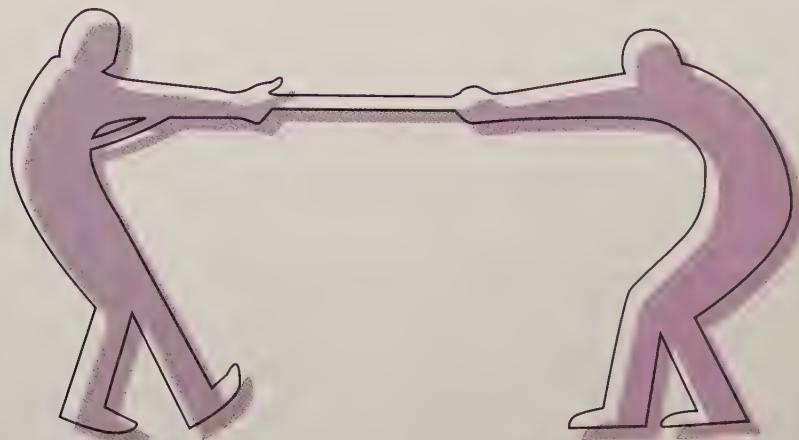


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# Don't Resist Resistance:

## Embracing Resistance as the Hard Work of CHANGE

Ted Dunn, Ph.D.



The purpose of this article is to assist those of us who participate in groups, and religious communities, in particular, to better understand and work with the phenomenon of resistance. I would like to *normalize* resistance as a natural concomitant to any change process and reframe it as something we should welcome, rather than resist for the annoyance that it is. I wish to focus upon the dynamics of change and its alter ego, resistance, in order to assist leadership teams, planners, facilitators and participants of meetings to understand better and work effectively with resistance when it occurs. I also hope to draw the distinction between *group process* and the dynamics of resistance and the *persons* who are part and parcel of these dynamics, yet are too often labeled as the “problem.”

### OUR PROPENSITY TO RESIST RESISTANCE

As a consultant working with leadership teams, and as a facilitator of assemblies and meetings, I am often met with the expectation that I am to “manage” potential resistance that may be encountered in a meeting or an assembly. Leadership teams and committees work long and hard planning processes to assist groups in accomplishing their goals. When the meeting day arrives, they understandably want to accomplish what they have spent weeks and months planning.

## Planning committees, leadership teams and, sometimes, facilitators have a tendency to view resistance as the enemy of change and treat it as such.

Consequently, planners do not want people who may be resistant to their goals or process to disrupt the meeting by “hijacking” the agenda or “derailing” the process. They do not want the larger group (or themselves) to be threatened by people who sometimes express their resistance with outbursts of anger or disruptive remarks. They do not want a vocal minority dominating an otherwise cooperative, albeit less vocal majority. And, quite naturally, they do not want the goodwill of an assembly and its desired outcomes for change to be undermined or sabotaged.

Planning committees, leadership teams and, sometimes, facilitators have a tendency to view resistance as the enemy of change and treat it as such. They are loath to address resistance, or the people who express it, in a forthright and direct manner. When leadership teams and committees are asked to share their reasons for this, their stories are replete with examples where resistance, and the people who expressed it, destroyed forward progress, if not the people involved. They will recount experiences in which facilitators failed to help them work through these challenging moments in an assembly and, as a result, people were hurt. Past encounters with resistance have resulted in people being wounded by irresponsible expressions of anger and poorly managed conflicts. It is not surprising, then, that many people are frightened of resistance and do not want to repeat destructive experiences.

Leadership teams and planning committees may intellectually appreciate the possibility that those who resist might have “something” to offer, but their experience tells them not to touch it; it is too dangerous and not worth the risk. Given their experience, there is a strong tendency to create processes that are neat and tidy and to navigate these processes with the least possible diversion, lest the forces of resistance take hold. Meeting participants are also appreciative of such smooth and conflict-free processes, as they, too, have an aversion to encountering frustrating, tedious or threatening interactions. Unfortunately, attempting to

create processes that will avoid resistance simply does not work and carries its own set of risks.

Though it is understandable that planners often want a facilitator to quell, control or coerce resistant individuals into cooperating, it is not always possible or prudent. While the aversion to dealing with resistance makes sense, taking the path of least resistance is not always the wise path to take, especially when the stakes are high and the goals being pursued are substantive. In fact, while it may seem counterintuitive, the path to more successful and solid change is actually one that embraces resistance rather than avoids or prevents it.

Rather than viewing resistance as the archenemy of change and a disruption to group process, I believe that working with resistance is the essence of working toward change and is, thus, a critical element to address within any group process. Resistance is the very grist for the task of *working through* change. Working through resistance is an important way in which substantive change occurs and, if we are fortunate, how conversion takes place as well.

### CONSEQUENCES OF AVOIDING RESISTANCE

While the aversion to resistance makes sense, the consequences of avoiding it are more subtle and costly than one might assume. If “peace at any price” is the unspoken norm going into an assembly or meeting, and if the path of least resistance is, indeed, the one chosen, what might be the gains, and what are the costs? The gains seem rather clear. The meeting, from the perspective of most participants, will *appear* successful if you remain unwaveringly faithful to the planned process, accomplish the goals in a timely and efficient manner and are undeterred by would-be resisters. If the *majority rules* on the decisions at hand, then no doubt the majority will congratulate you. If the process goes smoothly and you avert any potential conflict, then most participants will be appreciative of the mess-free, stress-free meeting.

However, what appears to be a smooth process or successful outcome often belies the fact that whatever conflicts, differences or pain that exists in the room has likely been driven underground (i.e., into the hallway or behind closed doors). Differences, if unattended to, don’t just vanish. People whose voices are not invited, respected or incorporated don’t just take this lying down. Their reactions to this will fester, and the dynamics, if not attended to directly, will go under-

ground and grow stronger.

The majority may *win* because they achieve their goals, but by what means and to what end? If, by contrast, the minority *loses* because they are stifled, and their offerings are dismissed as “tangential” or “inappropriate,” then where is the group, really? How successful is a meeting if the goals are accomplished at the expense of some relationships? How will decisions that are made be *owned* if the efforts in making them merely skim the surface in order to avoid conflict, and not everyone’s voice is invited to the microphones? Where does resistance go if the need to *appear* harmonious overrides and disallows its expression?

These are the types of questions that most of us do not want to be asked because the answers make us uncomfortable. Though the wounds of past failed efforts in addressing resistance remain in the memories of most leadership teams, participants, planners and facilitators, the answer is not to avoid it. The answer is to view resistance as a normal and important part of any change process. Further, the answer is to understand resistance as a partner and not as an adversary of change. The task is to develop skills of working with resistance rather than crumbling in the face of it. The discipline required is that of avoiding urges to make expedient decisions in the name of peace, while forfeiting substantive understanding, explanation and ownership of the implications and implementation. The challenge is to stay in the struggle long enough, and to probe the differences well enough, so the group makes solid decisions rather than building a house of cards. Perhaps the primary challenge is to find ways to create win-win solutions rather than win-lose decisions that ultimately come back to haunt everyone.

With this invitation to welcome resistance as a crucial ingredient for change, I would like to examine the nature of resistance and suggest some ways to work with it. What follows are five approaches to aid in your efforts to work more constructively with resistance:

- Understand resistance as a natural and necessary group dynamic, rather than as a problem or an anomaly. Expect it, invite it, and work with it as an ally, not as the enemy of a change process.

- Rather than focusing upon individuals who may have emotional difficulties, strident personalities or poor communications skills as being the problem in a group, it is more constructive to view their voices as part and parcel of a system. It is more constructive to

*While we ordinarily resist pain, we sometimes will choose an action with painful consequences, if we think it is worth it in the long run.*

focus your attention upon the group dynamic (i.e., the group’s struggle with resisting change), of which they play a part.

- Consider the possibility that the voices of resistance (no matter how poorly packaged) may have a grain of truth or a pearl worth discovering.

- Learn to recognize the signs of resistance in a group, as well as your own reactions to resistance, so you can respond proactively before reactions escalate out of control.

- Tease out the resistance you are encountering, and refine your discoveries; sift and sort what seems to fit; integrate new information, and expand your understanding.

#### REFRAMING RESISTANCE AS AN ALLY, NOT AS THE ENEMY

Resistance is natural to our human condition. Resistance is a natural occurrence in groups and individuals who are faced with something that may bring potential discomfort or pain. It is inbred into our human condition to avoid pain and seek out pleasure. Our higher cortical capacities for planning and moral conduct, however, enable us to get beyond these instinctual urges and to choose to postpone pleasure and endure temporary pain for something more important. We can sacrifice and endure pain for that which we perceive as more rewarding. We can delay gratification in the short run for better long-term gains. While we ordinarily *resist* pain, we sometimes will choose an action with painful consequences, *if we think it is worth it in the long run*. Moving beyond our resistance to encounter pain by choosing to go down a road of greater promise is the hallmark of psychological maturity and an essential element of any faith journey.

Resistance can be any attitude, thought, behavior or feeling that seems to thwart efforts toward reaching a goal or living out a commitment. We resist things that are asked of us, and even things that we, ourselves,

We learn that our resistance is not something that is *happening to us*, but is a *choice* that we make in order to avert the pain incurred in changing.

choose when we don't like them, want them, value them or fear what they might entail. For instance, while I might choose to go to the dentist, I might simultaneously *procrastinate* (i.e., resist) going to the dentist because I dread the pain of the dentist's drill. I might begin to *rationalize* (i.e., resist) that I can wait a few more months (e.g., "It's not that bad"). I might get wrapped up in doing the laundry or paying bills and *forget* (i.e., resist) my appointment.

Resistance need not be conscious or intentional. In fact, it is often unconscious, and we remain unaware of our own resistance. More often, we are conscious that we want to change, but we remain confused by our own self-defeating efforts. This is the very essence of what psychologists refer to as "neurosis." While we want to change, we simultaneously resist it. We go to a therapist to change our behavior and, then, we defend against the therapist's attempt to help us. We want to understand the truth, and yet we fear it at the same time.

Therapists help us to recognize that we often unconsciously or inadvertently sabotage our efforts to change, even though we desire to do so. We learn that our resistance is not something that is *happening to us*, but is a *choice* that we make in order to avert the pain incurred in changing. With this newfound awareness, we can then choose either to stay as we are or to change because we are more fully cognizant of the pain involved in either course of action. Resistance is no longer an unconscious adversary to the change process, but a *partner* that helps us appreciate the consequences we will incur if we make one choice over another.

Admittedly, this self-awareness is not welcomed or joyous news; nonetheless, it is valuable information. The value it yields is liberation. It gives us the freedom to make better-informed, value-based choices about the matter at hand, rather than choices resulting from reactive and fear-based urges. If we pay attention to the information that resistance offers us, we will learn so much. We will get a glimpse of the grieving and letting

go that will be asked of us, the compromises that will be needed, the difficult conversations we will need to have with those we care about and the practicing of new and awkward behaviors that we will have to embrace in order to change, etc. Resistance tells us where the pain is and, in so doing, the specific work we will need to do in order to move in one direction or another. Unpleasant though resistance may be, it is a valuable ally, a source of information and a virtual road map of the work ahead.

#### RESISTANCE IS NATURAL IN GROUPS

The first step in working with resistance is to understand resistance as a natural and necessary group dynamic, rather than as a problem or an anomaly. Expect it, invite it, and work with it as an ally, not as the enemy of a change process. Just as with individuals, resistance is an important dynamic to appreciate in a group. Groups also seek change and resist it at the same time. In a given group, individuals or subgroups take on the role of resisting a desired change. Some want change, while others resist it. Unfortunately, the individuals or subgroups resistant to change often get labeled as troublemakers or saboteurs or as problematic in one way or another. People begin to personalize this group dynamic and blame the persons resisting as spoilers of the group. They do not see the group as a system in which everyone plays a part.

In any group there is, of course, a small percentage of individuals who are mentally ill or emotionally unstable, and their resistance may say more about their personal struggles than it does about the group. In addition, some individuals who resist in a group may be more upset with those who are leading the group effort (e.g., leadership, facilitators) than with the group effort as such. And, there are certainly individuals who, in their struggle to understand and work with a group's effort, express their struggles in an unskilled manner (e.g., using judgmental, inflammatory or blaming language).

That said, the challenge that these individuals present still must be met, and it is more constructively met if understood and approached as part of group dynamic, rather than simply as an individual's problem. It is important to understand a group as an organism or system unto itself and not just as a collection of individuals. While individuals comprise a group, the group as a whole has dynamics and a life all its own. These two levels of an intact system (i.e., individuals and the group

they comprise) are not only separate and distinct, but they are connected and related, as well. An individual's behavior in a group says something about the individual, and it conveys something about the group (and vice versa). Each is a partial reflection of the other.

### RESISTANT INDIVIDUALS EXPRESS A GROUP'S RESISTANCE

Rather than focusing upon individuals who may have emotional difficulties, strident personalities or poor communications skills as being the problem in a group, it is more constructive to view their voices as part of a system. It is more constructive to focus your attention upon the group dynamic (i.e., the group's struggle with resisting change) of which they play a part. It is more important in understanding group dynamics to ask yourself what this behavior might say about us as a group? What might their resistance be telling us about us?

Resistant voices express a group's ambivalence about choices, but instead of appreciating this as valuable information, groups tend to scapegoat and blame the individuals for thwarting progress. We view the resistance as their problem, instead of attending to the group's resistance. Resistance, when expressed through individual voices in a group, is saying something about the group as a whole. Just as with our own efforts to change, the answer to these seemingly group-defeating voices is not to stamp them out. On the contrary, the answer is to listen more intently. The answer is not to cave into, ignore or react defensively to their abrasive delivery or their cries of anguish, but to engage them and listen. The challenge is to not discount the message simply because it is difficult to hear, poorly packaged or untimely in its delivery. These voices are inviting us to examine more fully what we are seeking and the potentially painful implications or missing pieces of our choices.

### RESISTANCE IS AN AS YET, UNDISCOVERED PIECE OF THE TRUTH

Consider the possibility that the voices of resistance (no matter how poorly packaged) may have a grain of truth or a pearl worth discovering. Resistance can be viewed either as a barrier or as a doorway to change, depending upon your perspective. From my perspective, I prefer to view resistance as a potential doorway to a deeper understanding. I believe that resistance is an, as yet, undiscovered piece of the truth. In other words, when we listen to resistance, when we

For instance, resistant voices can point out the flaws in a group's thinking or the pain that needs to be addressed, but that the group is perhaps avoiding.

take the time to understand what it is about, it often leads us to a deeper level of understanding about aspects of the truth heretofore neither fully appreciated nor incorporated.

Viewed in this manner, then, these so-called problematic people can be helpers to a group if the group is willing to listen. They can help a group recognize the work that needs to be done and about which the group is perhaps unaware or resistant to doing. For instance, resistant voices can point out the flaws in a group's thinking or the pain that needs to be addressed, but that the group is perhaps avoiding. They point to the conversations that need to happen that have not yet occurred or are, as yet, incomplete. They offer pearls that, if listened to, could assist a group to more fully integrate its understanding of the issue at hand.

I prefer to view resistance not as the barrier it appears to be, but as the invitation it can be to deepen our understanding of ourselves, our relationship with one another and, in a religious community, our faith journey. When we encounter resistance, we can either fight it or succumb to it as an obstacle, or we can reframe and embrace it as an invitation to grow. Viewed in this manner, it can be an invitation to search more deeply, share more fully and refine our perspective. Resistance, if explored, offers us the opportunity to be clearer about what we are saying. Resistant voices ask us to reexamine the values that undergird our position. Without voices of resistance, we would run the risk of making superficial changes because we do not have to be as accountable to address these hard questions or incorporate the wisdom of those who oppose the direction we are taking. The path of least resistance is not always the best path to take if you are seeking change built upon depth of understanding and integration of the diversity of many perspectives.

**It would behoove us to listen to these challenges, rather than throw the baby out with the bathwater and label these people as the problem.**

The decisions that groups are asked to face are typically big ones, ones that deserve the precious time of a group gathering. Those participants who resist in a group poke holes in decisions or directions that the majority of the group may desire. Despite the frequent problematic delivery, they inform us about the flaws in our reasoning, or they point out some information that is missing. Those who resist often oppose the decision because they believe that the group has not examined the implications adequately, or perhaps they object because they think that not enough diverse voices are heard in the process of decision-making. They tell us what we don't know, what we don't yet understand, what we haven't yet integrated. It would behoove us to listen to these challenges, rather than throw the baby out with the bathwater and label these people as the problem.

#### SIGNS OF RESISTANCE

What does resistance concretely look like? How is resistance acted out in a group setting, and how would you recognize it in yourself or others? There are an endless variety of behaviors that could convey resistance. Again, anything that seems to work against the chosen direction or established goal of a group could be considered a form of resistance. What follows is a sampling of some of the more common and, often, vexing ways in which resistance may be manifested in a group. Learn to recognize the signs of resistance in a group, as well as your own reactions to resistance, so you can respond proactively before reactions escalate out of control. It may be helpful for you to identify the ones that offer you the most challenge.

**Overly talkative:** A person tends to monopolize group time and take over in conversations.

**Overly silent:** A person is fearful, withdrawn or

angry and, consequently, refrains from speaking (even when asked).

**Hidden agendas:** A person expresses dissatisfaction with the direction of dialogue about an issue, but that person does not voice what is at stake for them.

**Direct aggression:** A person voices hostility toward the leadership, facilitator or another participant (e.g., "You are ridiculous. You have no right to tell us what to do").

**Passive aggression:** A person expresses anger in an indirect, camouflaged or veiled manner (e.g., verbal comments that are sarcastic; coming to the meeting late or leaving early).

**Victim language:** A person, directly or indirectly, blames others or states that some in the group are unjust or insensitive to the needs of others.

**Noncompliance, non-cooperation:** A person refuses to participate as requested (e.g., "I don't have to answer this question; it's irrelevant," or by not completing the task at hand).

**Outbursts:** A person suddenly throws a tantrum, displaying intense anger by yelling, accusing, venting or attacking.

**Ultimatums:** A person makes a threat in order to manipulate or coerce the group to act (or not) in specific ways (e.g., "If we don't stop talking about this, I'm going to leave!").

**Criticisms about the process or the content:** A person criticizes the process or content planned for the meeting (e.g., "I think we've spent too much time talking about this. We need to vote on it and move on!").

#### OUR RESISTANCE TO RESISTANCE

If resistance is natural, normal and so rich with potential, why wouldn't we want this type of help? Why wouldn't we want to make more solid, reflective, passion-filled and fully owned decisions by exploring the fruits of resistance? Our resistance to resistance is varied and complex; thus, I would not want to oversimplify it as merely our fear of encountering difficult behavior. Given the behavioral expressions of resistance mentioned above, I would like to elaborate on some of what prevents us from pursuing resistance. Let me outline what I consider to be some of the more compelling reasons:

We say we want ownership and involvement. However, to what extent do we value having to spend the time it takes to get everyone's voice into the process? Dealing with resistance takes time.

We say we want the passionate leaders who are willing to choose bold directions, but we stifle passion and boldness by choosing safe, overly sanitized processes in an attempt to avoid resistance.

We don't like to hear from those who resist in a blaming way because we don't like being publicly criticized, corrected and judged as being wrong or inadequate.

We don't want the tail wagging the dog; thus, we fear that those who voice resistance, if given enough air time, could sway or undermine the desires of the majority.

It is easier to label people and write them off as "anti-leadership," as having "authority issues," or as "crazy" rather than to challenge our judgmental attitudes, stretch our ways of thinking about them and their perspectives and open up to hear the potential wisdom that lies beneath their difficult behavior.

Those who resist often ask the hard questions and, consequently, challenge a group to work more diligently (e.g., gather more data, have more conversation, get more uncomfortable, etc.), and we don't want to work harder.

Those who resist often speak it in a manner that is unskilled or poorly packaged; we lose the pearl because we don't like the manner in which the message is delivered.

Challenging statements, even when expressed in a skilled and appropriate way, can bring groups to their knees if the facilitator and participants themselves are not willing and/or adept in how to handle conflict effectively within a group setting.

## REACTIONS TO RESISTANCE

When you get right down to it, probably the biggest problem we have with the resistance we encounter in others is that it is annoying, if not downright exasperating. We don't like it. When we ask another person to do something, and we think that there are wonderful reasons why they should, we become upset if they are not enthusiastic, or at least cooperative. When facing someone else's resistance we often feel hurt, frustrated, angry or discouraged; after all, we are just trying to do something that is "good" for them.

Our defensive reactions and our urges to control resistance are understandable because it is no fun to deal with this potentially destructive phenomenon in a group. No one likes resistance. However, I believe that it is important to see the potential value in it and find ways to deal with it constructively. Preventing, control-

When you get right down to it, probably the biggest problem we have with the resistance we encounter in others is that it is annoying, if not downright exasperating.

ling or resisting resistance is simply not helpful. Becoming aware of our "unhelpful" reactions and urges can help us choose to respond more constructively. See if you can find some of your own reactions listed among the following examples:

**Arguing:** We counter objections with logic, reason or passionate pleas to convince those resisting to change their position about an issue.

**Blaming:** We become angry when someone shoots down our ideas; thus, our response might be to dismiss, blame or punish the individual and/or the group (e.g., "Maybe someone else should have volunteered to be on the planning committee," or, "Your comment is off track and isn't appropriate").

**Convincing:** We determine that *they* are the only ones who should shift their perspective or position because the majority disagrees with their opinion.

**Threatening:** We use our authority or our ability to overpower someone as a means to gain compliance.

**Personalizing:** We often personalize resistance by thinking that they just don't like us rather than appreciating the behavior as something to which the group must attend (e.g., "It is because of something I said in the past," or, "If they were not here, all would be well").

**Disengaging:** It is easy to become discouraged and decide that *it's not worth it*, in the face of resistance.

**Going over, under or around; anywhere but through:** We tend to interact more with participants who are more receptive and like-minded, while ignoring those whose voice is different.

Whatever are your tendencies in the face of resistance, learn to recognize and work with it. Befriend your reactions as a helpful sign that something important is happening: So pay attention. Let it be your guide to inform you about where the work is most

**With a little hard work, you may be able to de-escalate the tension, restore group safety and discover whatever new information is begging to be understood.**

needed, as well as an invitation to explore, as yet, undiscovered pieces of the truth.

#### WORKING WITH RESISTANCE

While there are tremendous benefits to working with resistance, this is a task that is easier spoken about than done. My partner and wife, Beth Lipsmeyer, Ph.D., and I teach conversational and conflict resolution skills through a program called **CARE** to communities that are seeking to grow in their collective capacity to dialogue more effectively. (Conversation Approach to Relational Effectiveness — **CARE** — is a training program Comprehensive Consulting Services designed to provide religious communities and other groups with tools for engaging in more effective dialogues and conflict resolution.)

However, not every community or group has a felt need to seek such comprehensive training. If training all your group's members is not an option, it may make sense to train a core group of people (e.g., assembly table facilitators) who could learn the necessary skills of working with resistance. This could benefit the entire group in accomplishing various and difficult agenda. Exploring all the skills necessary for working with resistance is beyond the scope of this article. However, here are a few tips to hold onto for your next meeting or assembly:

Remember, the goal is to tease out the resistance you are encountering and refine your discoveries; sift and sort what seems to fit; integrate new information, and expand your understanding. In response to an angrily expressed statement (e.g., "I don't like the way you are controlling this group!"), rather than run for the hills or respond in kind, try to remember these three things: **Engage, Respond and Explore**. While there is no formulaic way of responding to resistance,

if you can make these three efforts in a genuine manner you will improve your odds of responding successfully. At the very least, the resistant person and the group will breathe a sigh of relief that at least you are trying. They and the group will be more forgiving of your mistakes if you try to work with the tension rather than avoid it (e.g., "let's take a break"). With a little hard work, you may be able to de-escalate the tension, restore group safety and discover whatever new information is begging to be understood.

**Engage** the participant directly by paraphrasing what you heard the participant say. The greater the tension, the more likely it is that we distort what we hear, so checking it out is important. In addition, the simple act of engaging a person in our efforts to understand will usually put them at ease (rather than escalate the tension). They are likely ill-at-ease to begin with and bracing themselves for a retort of some kind or an argument. They may feel embarrassed and defensive because of their own outburst. Help them put down their guard by indicating your desire to partner with them, rather than argue with them or embarrass them further. It can ease their anxiety if they experience that they are not alone or out on a limb without a net, and that you will hang in there with them.

Summarize what you think they said and don't use pat phrases, such as, "What I hear you saying is...." That sounds like a technique, and most people don't want techniques inflicted on them. Simply paraphrase ("So you're telling me...."; or, "What you want me to understand is...."). After you try to summarize what you think they said, check out your accuracy. More often than not, especially amid tension, our efforts to paraphrase do not quite capture accurately what is said. Upon hearing their words back, they will appreciate having been heard and being given the opportunity to modify what they intended to say. This usually helps people refine and say better what they are trying to say (i.e., less harshly, more clearly).

After you have gone back and forth a bit clarifying what they meant and ensuring an accurate understanding, then **respond**. Ideally, your response is intended to open up a dialogue, not put an end to it by giving a pat answer. Your response should be one of invitation toward deeper understanding. Be genuine and constructive in your response. In other words, don't soft-soap it by pretending to be delighted with their response (if you are not), and don't just respond in kind (by arguing). For example, you might say something

like, "I'm really struggling with what you are saying because I experience being judged by you. I honestly don't know what I did that you view as controlling. Can you help me understand...?" Your invitation toward deeper understanding needs to be real, not just a polite way to get them to justify their remark. If it is genuine, it will open things up, rather than shut them down.

After your initial response, **explore** what may be at stake for them, and the group, beyond the one remark that sparked it all. Find a bridge that connects their remark to the group as a whole (most often there is one). Help them articulate the piece of wisdom that may be underneath (e.g., "I wonder if what sparked your reaction was because our process did not make room for looking at the downside of this decision," or, "I wonder if what you're needing the group to understand most is that there is a dilemma in choosing this direction because..."). What you are listening for is something of what they said, or implied, that can be worthwhile to the group. If it just remains at the personal level, the group will experience your intervention as a "waste of time."

Embracing the difficult work of resistance is perhaps the hardest of all challenges encountered in group process. Clearly, it can be destructive and divisive to a group, but it can also be most rewarding and transformative if worked through successfully. The next time you encounter resistance, consider its potential gift to the group; think of it as an ally to the work of the group and a doorway toward deeper change.

Perhaps with a new mindset and a willingness to engage, respond and explore, you will find your way to a whole new level of understanding.

#### RECOMMENDED READINGS

Hultman, K. *Making Change Irresistible: Overcoming Resistance to Change in Your Organization*. Palo Alto, CA: Davis-Black Publishing, 1998.

Maurer, R. *Beyond the Wall of Resistance: Unconventional Strategies that Build Support for Change*. Austin, TX: Bard Books, 1996.

Quinn, R. E. "Overcoming Resistance," *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1996.



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## RELIGIOUS BELIEFS BENEFICIAL TO TEEN-AGERS

According to psychologist Thomas Ashby Wills, Ph.D., of Albert Einstein College of Medicine, religious or spiritual beliefs protect adolescents from dangerous behaviors. Interestingly, however, this protective factor does not seem to stem from adhering to religious "do's" and "don'ts," but rather from the fact that religious beliefs help teens face life stresses better and thus keep them from smoking, drinking and drug use under stress.

His study of adolescents in New York City appeared in *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors* (Vol. 17, No. 1, 2003). Another study of African-American teens in rural Iowa and Georgia produced the same findings. In addition, Gene H. Brody, Ph.D., of the University of Georgia, in three articles published in *Developmental Psychology* (Vol. 32, No. 4), *Child Development* (Vol. 69, No. 3) and *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (Vol. 56, No. 4), reports that in a sample of African-American couples in the rural South, parental involvement in religion was correlated with a more harmonious marriage and better parenting skills, which led to better school performance and more competence in their children, behaviors associated with the avoidance of alcohol and drug use.

These findings are reported in "The Secret of the 12 Steps" by Rebecca Clay in *Monitor on Psychology* (December, 2003, 50-51); the article notes the benefits of religion or spirituality in 12-Step programs.

# Is Your Heart in It?

James Torrens, S.J.

## To Hope

Your laugh comes back to me now,  
spontaneous and unrehearsed.

You're a kid with skinned knees  
and a big embarrassed grin.

There is always some poor creature  
you refuse to give up on.

Though tattooed with misfortune,  
it does not blemish you.

The oddsmakers murmur  
at your betting on longshots.

With your elves' eyes  
you lead us through the woods.

In the choppiest seas  
you ride at anchor.

**A**s I look back on many years of teaching, here is the question I should have asked myself before each class: "Is your heart really in it?" Often, I'm afraid, it wasn't. In those cases, I missed the secret of great teaching, which is to infect the willing student with what you are presenting. It is not a matter of being full of oneself, or gifted with a dramatic flair, but of being genuinely excited by what you have to share.

Consider Jesus bursting with enthusiasm about the kingdom, that twin vision of how God would like things to be and how God is presently at work. This drew people to him irresistibly. They tried to

hold onto him when he wanted to move on, but he, with that message, the word of God's love, burning within him, insisted, "I have to get to the next town." Jesus and the apostles, we are told, could hardly find time to eat, so great was the demand on them. This was not workaholism, the label we are tempted to slap on achievers today, but dedication and single-mindedness. Jesus was not unaware of the need for breathers, of the weekly day off, but the eagerness of the crowds made that pretty difficult to attain.

The "Magnificat," the church's hymn ascribed to Mary, catches the exultation of true faith: "My soul opens to the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit has jumped for joy in God my Savior, because he turned his eye to my lowliness." I like to think of the Irish farmer digging for potatoes late in the nineteenth century, who came up with the Ardagh chalice, now a national treasure. This exquisite gold filigree Eucharistic vessel must have taken his breath away. Or, how about Mary Magdalene, relieved of her seven devils? Didn't her heart lift in the course of every succeeding day.

Awareness of God, thankfulness, self-forgetfulness — this is the package that makes for an authentic witness, the type of person who is a sign of God for others. We may talk of priestly and religious vocation until we are blue in the face, but what will draw young adults to the service of God is the palpable evidence that our own heart is really in it. How can we be this way, Spirit-filled, without faking it? True religion is not an exalted emotion that you work yourself into. It is a persuasion, an abiding and underlying current that can lift our boat permanently.

Good spirits born of a lively faith do not guarantee a smooth road. They do not conjure away an unfriendly milieu, diametrically opposed values, tensions with fellow workers, apparent failure. Any one of these circumstances can take the heart out

of us. What about illness, which has a way of focusing the ego upon itself? What about the deeply imbedded ills, social or political or moral, that seem to mock individual effort? Can we command our heart at such times?

We have to recall, first off, the example of Jesus as his reception turned sour. When his future darkened, the smile must have come to his face less often. Yet his mission still galvanized him. The peak of his human warmth, as each Eucharist reminds us, came at the Last Supper, with calamity just ahead. He knew his disciples to be weaklings, with a betrayer seated amongst them; yet he could say to them all, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). Desire, eagerness and a transcendent hope, despite the bleakest of prospects, moved our Savior.

The fading of optimism can be the moment for hope to kick in. This was the message smuggled out of jail and later harped upon in his writings by the Vietnamese cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan. *Testimony of Hope*, *The Road of Hope*, *Prayers of Hope* all circle around this assertion. The same message comes from a more secular source, the hematologist and oncologist Jerome Groopman, in his provocative new book, *The Anatomy of Hope: How People Prevail in the Face of Illness*.

Groopman begins with a definition of hope that puts it beyond the starry-eyed expectation of newlyweds. "Hope does not arise from being told to think positively....Hope is the elevating feeling we experience when we see — in the mind's eye — a path to a better future. Hope acknowledges the significant obstacles and deep pitfalls along the path."

Groopman recounts in detail a handful of his cases, some of them shadowed by failures to hope and others brightened by the opposite. He

sums up his observations: "Belief and expectation — the key elements of hope — can block pain by releasing the brain's endorphins and enkephalins, mimicking the efforts of morphine." This helps him explain why, in controlled experiments, placebos can sometimes have the same effect as drugs in lessening pain. Furthermore, "in some cases, hope can also have important effects on fundamental physiological processes like respiration, circulation, and motor function."

The interchange of flesh and spirit, baneful or beneficial, commands major interest these days, as can be seen in the issue of *Newsweek*, "The New Science of Mind and Body" (September 27, 2004). Says Groopman: "The body talks to the brain powerfully" to shape our sense of hope and despair, and the brain is able to talk back, "setting a firm goal and anticipating the reward of living with the dream fulfilled." The author warns against a naïve and self-deceptive facsimile of hope. "False hope can lead to intemperate choices and flawed decision making. True hope takes into account the real threats that exist and seeks to navigate the best path around them." True hope is a source of resilience; false hope is in for a rude shock.

Groopman concedes, at the conclusion: "Many people searching for hope look to their faith." The connection between faith and hope was clear to Viktor Frankl in the concentration camp at Dachau, as we can read in *Man's Search for Meaning*. In this desperate milieu, Frankl observed at first hand how the body's resistance can suddenly collapse with the loss of courage or hope. On the positive side, he was convinced by Nietzsche: "He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*."

The centerpiece of *Man's Search for Meaning* is the account of a day when all the prisoners were deprived of food for a day for refusing to

divulge which of them stole a few potatoes. Morale was at zero. Somebody called on Frankl to give them a talk. This is what he told them. "I estimated my own chances of survival at about one in twenty. . . but I had no intention of losing hope and giving up. For no man knew what the future would bring, much less the next hour." He had them recollect all that they had to live for. He concluded by speaking of the great value of "our sacrifice, which had meaning in every case. . . Those of us who had any religious faith, I said frankly, could understand without difficulty."

Viktor Frankl in the concentration camp, at the extremity of endurance, was asking his companions the big question about their life: Is your heart in it? And he was saying to them openly: Take heart! That needs saying over and over to

every dedicated person who senses and bears the woes of the world. If we ourselves become woe-ful, what a countersign to everyone. When under that cloud, we repel rather than attract. Consider Jesus in his farewell message to his dearest disci-ples, at the threshold of his passion. What were his final words to them, just before beginning what we call his priestly prayer? "Take heart, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).



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## LETTER TO EDITOR

Dear Editor:

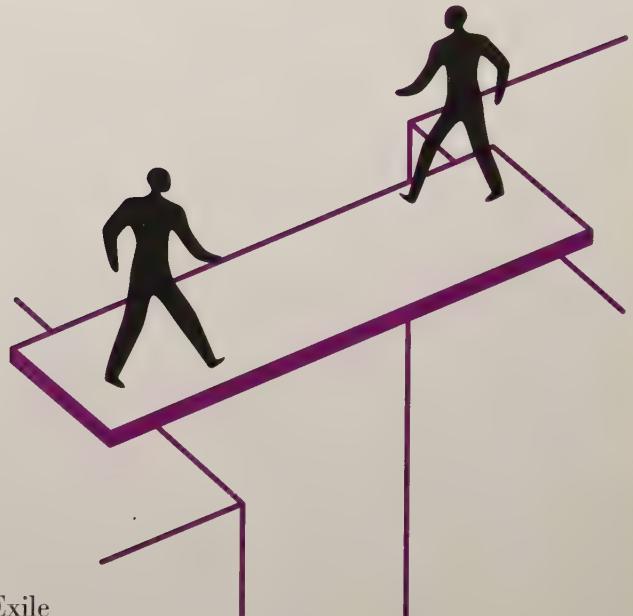
With great satisfaction I have read and reread your Spring 2004 issue (*Towards Healing Our Church*). I am most grateful for all the work done to compose this special 25th anniversary issue. I find a lot of help, both practical and theoretical, in the articles for my work with a number of victims of sexual abuse. I admire very much the tremendous preventative work done by the late Father James Gill, Founding Editor, and by Linda Amadeo, Executive Editor, who, through the Christian Institute of Human Sexuality, tried to educate and train those engaged in the formation of future priests and religious in areas of sexual maturity. This work was aimed at the future min-isters of the church. But because of my own experience as a major superior of a religious congregation I am also interested in the question of how to approach and to help the perpetrators of the past. Could you organize an issue of *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT* or some arti-cles in which qualified people struggle with this question? I would appreciate some input that might help us all to appreciate better the personal and societal factors that led to the abusive behavior and to know how best to help those who engaged in this behavior.

Sincerely,  
Bro. Johan Muijtjens, f.i.c., Maastricht

(The editor would be happy to consider articles on this question.)

# Exile and Exodus: *Paradigms of Life*

J. Edward Owens, O.S.S.T., Ph.D.



Two key themes in the scriptures are exile and exodus. Exile is about displacement with the hope of one day returning home. Exodus bespeaks going forth, never looking back and embracing a new land. One typically thinks of Babylon in terms of exile: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, there we wept, as we remembered Zion” (Ps. 137:1).

When the nearly fifty years of exile ended in 539 B.C.E., two “remnants” faced one another: those left behind in Judah and those who chose to return from Babylon. Further, there were those who were born in exile and had created lives of their own. Many youths were surely less than enthusiastic about returning to some “Promised Land” based on romantic homeland stories of their elders.

One typically thinks of exodus as the departure through the Sea of Reeds (Exod. 14-15), a saga intrinsic to Israel’s identity and self-understanding. Yet, barely on their way, the Israelites begin to murmur: “And the people complained against Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’” (Exod.15:24). These citations give evidence that exile and exodus are not simply romantic themes. Exile and exodus are ever bittersweet. Hence, they serve as biblical-spiritual paradigms for the vagaries of human life.

## OUR LIFE AS DEPARTURES AND RETURNS

Yearning to return home is a popular theme in the arts. One thinks of the song “The Green, Green Grass of Home,” or the movie “The Wizard of Oz.” Nostalgia often comes full-circle in a familiar, never changing place. The song I cite above says that the old farmhouse looks the same; in the movie Dorothy sighs, “There’s no place like home.” In the course of human growth we learn that any return is often mixed with pleasure and sadness. People and things are indeed familiar but somehow not the same as they were. The family home of a generation or more has been sold, and parents placed in assisted living. Youths half our age ask us where we’re from! But we are wise not to become cynical about romantic ideals. Ideals help us to inculcate timeless values and engender hope in one another. Ideals help us make sense of the threads in the tapestry of life that look like exiles.

Exodus as going forth paints a similar portrait: Moses leading his motley crew of freed slaves to a land of milk and honey, or Tom Joad escaping the Oklahoma dustbowl for a California dream. Between departures and arrivals so much happens. In life and literature we walk the crooked lines of lust, betrayal, lost direction and death. But the determination never to look back or go back keeps us on the journey. When healthy and holy, an exodus bespeaks some level of closure or new opportunity: e.g., the closure of an abusive relationship, the opportunity to realize one’s gifts in a strange but attractive place that beckons us.

## EXILE: IN THE STEPS OF OUR FIRST PARENTS

Not often do readers understand the banishment of Adam and Eve as the Bible’s first exile. The couple is displaced to East of Eden, toward a region traditionally the place of sinner and demons. They are out of harmony with God and creation. Theirs is the one exile in the scriptures from which neither they nor later generations ever return. The closest harmonizing that biblical theology offers is through the book of Revelation: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . .” (21:1). The old heaven and earth had passed away.

Yet there is blessing hidden in the exile of Adam and Eve, even though they never go home again. First, Adam and Eve are more than individual characters; they represent humanity in general. Eve is titled moth-

In the course of human growth we learn that any return is often mixed with pleasure and sadness. People and things are indeed familiar but somehow not the same as they were.

er of all the living (Gen. 3:20). Their sin evokes the emergence of conscience, a requisite of healthy human development. “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked” (Gen. 3:7). Indeed, “the Fall” is hardly appropriate for what occurs in the story. They inaugurate the first collision between God’s perfect goodness and human freedom. They are not punished with death for eating the fruit as the Lord had warned (Gen. 2:17). With care, God fashions leather loincloths for them and even clothes them himself (Gen. 3:21). Most importantly, they are destined to embrace their mortality: “You are dust, and to dust you shall return (Gen. 3:19). Unlike the popular misconception, death is not a penalty for sin in Genesis 2-3. They are banished *lest* they reach the tree of life and live forever. In sum, their exile is in some ways a blessing in disguise: the emergence of human conscience, facing the consequences of sin, experiencing God’s mitigation of sin and heading out to new frontiers in the created order with freedom intact and fertility still blessed (Gen. 4:1-2; cf. 1:28). We share in such blessings as the children of Eve.

## EXODUS: IN THE STEPS OF MOSES, AARON AND MIRIAM

The Israelites depart in song from Egypt and laden with gifts of clothing and precious metals from their former captors. The Song of the Sea (Exod. 15) offers a splendid context for the beginning of the journey. Once the reluctant leader, Moses is now confident: “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance the Lord will accomplish for you today” (Exod. 14:13). Once vacillating in their fledgling faith, the Israelites are awed for the moment: “Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and his servant Moses” (Exod. 14:31). The Song of the Sea encap-

We have no sure control over where our journey will take us, but we have control over the attitudes, behaviors and choices we bring to the journey.

sulates the proper disposition of exodus partners. It is the Lord's exodus invitation and victory, not an accomplishment of the Israelites. The contrast between the Israelites and the Egyptians is noteworthy. In verse 2 the entourage sings of the Lord as *my* strength, *my* might, *my* salvation, *my* God and God of *my* father. In verse 9 the Egyptians boast that *I* will pursue, *I* will divide the spoil, *my* desire shall have its fill of them, *I* will draw the sword, *my* hand shall destroy them. The contrast between humility and narcissism speaks for itself. Humility and appreciation of exodus as essentially a gift must be remembered through the ages.

The song is often predicated of Moses, with Miriam and her women an afterthought (see Exod. 20:21). Some have suggested that it was originally Miriam's song, a woman's anthem, but later attributed to Moses out of patriarchal bias. Beyond such interpretive issues, valuable though they be, I suggest that the question "Whose song is it?" remains secondary to a biblical-spiritual reading of the text. Ultimately, the song is of the Lord and to the Lord. In that context it is then *our* song and belongs to the community. To walk in the steps of others as exodus people demands that bickering over ownership not come to overshadow grace. Moses, Aaron and Miriam are all remembered as ancestors all too human. Moses angers the Lord at the waters of Meribah (Num. 20); Aaron facilitates casting the golden calf (Exod. 32); Miriam suffers leprosy for challenging Moses' authority (Num. 12). Their steps on the exodus journey are no less circuitous than ours. We have no sure control over where our journey will take us, but we have control over the attitudes, behaviors and choices we bring to the journey.

#### EXILE AND EXODUS: IN THE STEPS OF THE PRODIGAL SON

I understand the parable of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:11-32) as a masterful interplay between exile and

exodus. Ironically, both brothers are somehow in exile, one self-displaced and the other back at home in the isolation of anger and bitterness. The prodigal son may think he has a well-planned exodus strategy: his inheritance in the pocket and an exotic land ahead. In just three verses the adventure turns into a nightmarish exile. He never learned the lessons of practical wisdom from his father and mother (Prov. 1:8; Sir. 3:1-16). He lives for the day in dissolute living, never anticipating any negative turn of events. The world is his oyster. Famine changes all that in a heartbeat. The pigs he tends are a perfect metaphor for his plight. In the scriptures pigs symbolize lack of good sense and wastefulness (Prov. 11:22; Matt. 7:6), a developmental issue he so well embodies.

When the son breaks away to return to the father, he receives quite a surprise. He deserves a good dressing-down but instead gets all dressed up! He encounters the unconditional love characteristic of God and essential to human growth. Such would be a fairy tale ending until the brother shows up, from working in the field no less. Suddenly, the episode returns to life before the prodigal son left home. Both brothers have grieved in an emotional and spiritual exile. Now it is time to face the definition of home that Robert Frost describes in a poem: the place where, when you need to go, they have to take you in. What the son encounters in the father is the *hesed* (Hebrew for mercy, steadfast love, loyalty; see Ps. 118) that bespeaks our relationship with God and with one another. Human maturity is ever earmarked by the resolve to make a consistent investment in the life of others. The steps of the prodigal son have been our own at times. We exile others and even ourselves at times; we go on a dream of exodus that turns into exile. Sometimes our desire never to look back unfolds, ironically, as a yearning to return.

#### EMBRACING OUR DEPARTURES AND RETURNS

If exile and exodus are paradigmatic of human life and growth, what are we called to embrace on these journeys? I suggest that scriptural stories like those discussed above help us find a balance. To begin, exile challenges us to find sameness amid change. Such sameness is not a dull, stagnant existence but the effort to nurture those few people and places about which we say to one another, "We always pick up where we left off." Most everyone has a seldom seen relative or friend with whom our next conversation or visit is as if we'd

just spoken yesterday. We enter their home, even years later, and know just what drawer to open or switch to pull. We can sit in silence comfortably together for long periods and maybe even finish the other's statement. Once in a while we can go home again and enjoy the sameness of a holy place in our life.

Exile as displacement offers opportunities for change. Change expresses itself in letting go of the irretrievable, as well as in reconciliation and making life changes for the better. Exile challenges us to separate the grain from the chaff, to reevaluate what was once deemed a necessity but now realized as an expendable luxury all along. Exile also offers the opportunity to build bridges. Can we find meaning among our "captors" and in foreign places? Is there common ground upon which we all can stand? Such are the hidden gifts of exile in our lives.

Exodus in our life challenges us to gather the mixed crowd, the motley crew. It is of divine wisdom that the first biblical exodus was of mixed ancestry (Exod. 12:38; see Josh. 9:3-21; 24:14-28). Many a people have been grafted onto spiritual vines apart from ethnic and cultural background. On our exodus journeys can we invite along those of other values and visions of faith? Can we continue to walk with our decidedly "dysfunctional" family members and respond as father/mother to a prodigal son/daughter in the spirit of Luke's parable? Exodus can only be authentic if we engage with such questions.

Further, exodus demands that we cultivate the wisdom of what to take and leave behind as we journey to a new land. What negative memories and unjust caricatures are best left behind, and what abiding gifts should we be certain to take on the journey? What is perishable and imperishable, of temporary or lasting value? I have often thought of the biblical motifs of milk and honey from this perspective: "I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exod. 3:8; see also 3:17; 13:5; Num. 13:27; 16:13-14; Deut. 31:20; Jer. 11:5; Ezek. 20:6, 15). Milk is highly perishable and often made into sour curds and yogurt. In the ancient world milk came mostly from goats because they can produce it even in the most arid regions. Honey, however, is essentially nonperishable and lasts for years as the sweet treat of nomads. Honey in the ancient world was made mostly from fruit such as dates, not the beehive honey we think of today. Hence, the land of milk

**Exile challenges us to separate the grain from the chaff, to reevaluate what was once deemed a necessity but now realized as an expendable luxury all along.**

and honey symbolizes the vagaries of the perishable and nonperishable, the fleeting and the enduring in life. In the land the people must embrace both, as they must embrace life and death, good fortune and trials, letting go and embracing the stages of life and so many other realities in the divine plan of creation.

Returning to the biblical stories discussed above, I suggest that they offer us paradigms for empowerment in life's exile and exodus experiences.

#### ADAM AND EVE: THE POWER OF THE FAMILY OF ORIGIN

Family of origin is one aspect of human formation I discuss with seminarians as their advisor. Ethnic and cultural background, order of birth among siblings and countless family memories form the tapestry of their life. I was only alarmed once when a young man stated, "What does any of that have to do with me?" I have often found that asking about the family invites lively and transparent conversation, building bridges of trust and sharing in future conversations. The dictum that the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree may not at first seem relevant to human development or training for church ministry, but the open and invested candidate soon realizes that it speaks pages. Is this my vocation or my mother's dream of me? Do the memories of hearing parents argue constantly or sharing few meals at a table impact on the order, scheduling, silence and "neatness" I find so attractive in the seminary or a religious community? Does the chemical addiction of my brother or the lapsed faith of my sister touch my life and how? What does that look like, feel like?

Family of origin is our first venue of experiencing and dealing with power issues in life. The power of parents, teachers, coaches, older siblings and peers on the playground leave their mark in some way, conscious or not. Early experiences are the filters through which we

later process issues of physical, economic, symbolic and even religious/spiritual power. Power impacts on self-esteem, boundaries, co-dependency and other developmental issues. The Yahwist tradition, which most scholars believe stands behind the story of Adam and Eve, demonstrates practical psychology. God says the couple may eat from any tree in the garden but one (Gen. 2:16-17). Ah, forbidden fruit always tastes better! Later, when confronted by the Lord as they hide in their naked shame (the emergence of conscience), Adam and Eve share the same first line of defense, the blame game: The woman *you* gave *me* gave me the fruit, so I ate it. The serpent tricked *me* (Gen. 3:12-13). We are all the children of Adam and Eve as we engage in the same ploys. The challenge is to take ownership of our life, learn wisdom from experience and keep a watchful eye on previous life experiences that still impact on us in so many ways.

#### MOSES, AARON AND MIRIAM: THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

Part of the richness of the scriptures is the legacy of the ancestors: "Let us now sing the praises of famous men, our ancestors in their generations" (Sir. 44:1; see 44:1-50:24). The myriad of patriarchs and matriarchs in the scriptures resonates with the ancient Greek encomium that praises individuals who embody the ideals of the culture. Ancestors, ancient and modern, shape the face of "our story." Indeed, often more important is not the historicity of their lives, with its certain shadow sides, but how they are remembered. Ancestors become larger than life.

Ancestors are named and elevated by the community, much akin to the cult of the saints. They embody the best of our ideals and give us encouragement in darker hours. Paradigmatic are figures such as those in the scriptural Exodus event. Moses with brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, leads the Israelites to the Promised Land. They grapple with the protracted journey, calm the murmuring along the way and act as envoys between the Lord and their people. In sum, they are community builders. To build effectively they have to have a real and honest sense of "our story" and make it meaningful and workable amid all the vagaries of exile and exodus. They teach that our story is not all about us. Our story is about standing before God in sincerity and truth. Recalling the marvelous deeds the Lord has done for us (a great theme in the scriptures) inculcates the gifts of gratitude and generosity.

No matter what is going on around us we make time to spend together and celebrate folk rituals that incarnate the ideals of love, reconciliation, peace and new beginnings.

Gratitude means that we appreciate those around us; generosity means that we want to share our good fortune with others, to draw still others in. We appreciate the land we share as ultimately a gift. The Lord is owner of the land; we are his vassals still. The only difference is that our allegiance is not to the oppressive Pharaoh but to the Lord who has redeemed us into a covenant relationship: "It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you . . . It was because the Lord loved you . . ." (Deut. 7:7).

#### PRODIGAL SONS AND DAUGHTERS: THE POWER OF CONSISTENT INVESTMENT

I recall a comment stating that the mature person makes a consistent investment in the life of others. Mature parents are able to let go of their children as they move into young adulthood; mature adult children take care of their elderly parents in the ironic reversal of "childhood" roles: taking away dad's car keys, moving mother into assisted living, assuming responsibility for their financial and healthcare needs. The prodigal son returns to a father consistently loving him and anticipating him. The son's exodus dream turned into an exilic nightmare does not motivate the father's response to him. The parent is love incarnate, a love extended to both sons amid the turmoil of sibling rivalry.

Family, perhaps more than any other paradigm, demands inclusion and embrace. Life lessons about consistent investment are first learned around the simple dinner table, as well as annual holiday rituals. No matter what is going on around us we make time to spend together and celebrate folk rituals that incarnate the ideals of love, reconciliation, peace and new beginnings. Therein we learn what consistent investments are all about. Only from there can we ever hope to

embrace the prodigal sons and daughters who will cross our paths in exile and exodus.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Exile and exodus share a common soil, the Holy Ground that the Lord introduced to Moses at the burning bush: "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Exod. 3:5). This common soil, this great Promised Land if you will, is ours. The challenge is to see and even smell it as somehow holy. Life's journeys, as exile or exodus, can only have promise, election and covenant if we keep our eyes and ears open to the holy. Holiness is not only being set apart for something special but also being invested in the ordinary events of life. Both realms are holy.

Exile and exodus typically involve a wilderness experience. Although wilderness/desert evokes images of deprivation and discomfort, that place also offers the opportunity for soul searching. In the desert we murmur, get lost, challenge our leaders and even get sarcastic: "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (Exod. 16:3). In the desert we wander, not only territorially but also emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. In the end we learn, it is to be hoped, practical wisdom for living well in this life and walk with (sometimes carry) one another along the way.

#### RECOMMENDED READINGS

Gowan, D. E. *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994.

Larsson, G. *Bound For Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999.

Smith-Christopher, D. L. *A Biblical Theology of Exile*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002.

Volf, M. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.

Zornberg, A. G. *The Particulars of Rapture: Reflections on Exodus*. New York: Doubleday, 2001.



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#### LETTER TO EDITOR

Dear Editor:

I have been receiving HUMAN DEVELOPMENT almost since it was founded and am grateful for all that the magazine has done over these twenty-five years. Since I have myasthenia gravis, I was very interested in the article "Spirituality of Living with Multiple Sclerosis" by Rev. Joseph Weigman (Summer 2004) and want to make copies for our support group. Father Weigman speaks of a lot of the emotions I had when I was told I had MG at the age of 63. But I don't think I have worked as well through a spiritual handling of my disease. I know that I have made some adjustments. I have told others that God does not need a perfectly healthy person in order to do God's work; but God needs someone who is open to letting God do the work, no matter what our human condition is. Now I need to listen to my own advice.

Sincerely,  
Rev. Leon J. Flaherty, C.PPS.